SHORT STORIES

No. 787. Week Ending January 30, 1904. Price One Penny.

"MY LOST WIFE! WILL SHE EVER RETURN?"

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "A Fatal Fascination." See inside.)

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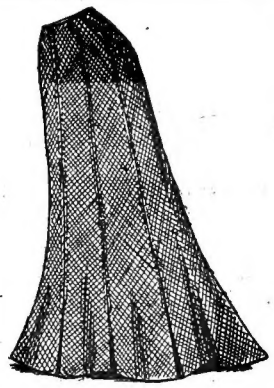

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27 JAN 1904

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SHORT STORIES

No. 787.] Week Ending January 30th, 1904. [One Penny.

A Fatal Fascination.

The Story of a Secret Marriage.

"Yes. My life was rather lonely until you came, Ashley. My father has always been very kind to me, and I have had few wishes which he has not gratified. But—well, there was always something wanting. I suppose, having no mother, I felt the want more keenly. A girl needs a good mother, for a good mother always understands. And I do not even remember mine."

The speaker was a tall, dark, slender girl of nineteen, with deep, eloquent eyes and rich olive complexion. As Ashley Arlington looked down at her, he inwardly admitted she had been appropriately christened—Gypsy.

Colonel Powyss—her father—was a fine, tall, soldierly-looking man of fifty. He had seen a good deal of service, particularly in India, but had lately handed in his papers and retired to his fine old estate in Warwickshire. He loved his daughter—his only child—very dearly.

But Gypsy had always felt the need of a mother. When Ashley had come into her life six months before, the old need seemed to be partially supplied, for the fine, stalwart young man by her side had wrought many wonderful changes in the warm, impulsive heart of sweet Gypsy Powyss.

"Does the Colonel ever mention her to you?" asked Ashley after a pause. "I have never seen a portrait of her at the Hall."

Gypsy sighed.

"No," she said, with a little troubled drooping of her pretty mouth, "he never alludes to her. When I began to think for myself, I asked him about her. But he seemed so ill at ease and gave such evasive replies to my questions that I allowed the subject to drop. The only thing he has told me is that she died in India when I was but a year old.

"As for her portrait, I am not surprised that you have never seen it at the Hall. Ever since I can remember, my father has had it in his own private study. As soon as we came here, after my grandfather's death, dad had the picture hung in a quiet little room on the ground floor, with a door leading into the garden.

"I wonder if he is there now. If not, I may get you a glimpse of the portrait, for the door is glass-panelled. Let us walk under the wall of the old house, and perhaps we may see it."

They got up from the low, rustic seat in the little arbour, skirted the pretty flower-filled garden, and moved along in the cool shade of the stately building. Presently Gypsy stopped.

"Look," she said, "there it is. Isn't she lovely?"

The sliding glass door was half open. Ashley Arlington looked through and his eyes fell on a picture hanging on the wall. For some minutes he never spoke. Gypsy had slipped her hand through his arm and gazed from him to the picture in pleased anticipation.

"Pity that one so beautiful should die so young," he said at last, and his voice touched a tender chord in the girl's breast. "I do not wonder that the Colonel mourns her even after so many years. But I must go now, darling. The governor wants me this afternoon. My horse is at the gate. Good-bye, sweetheart. I shall be over again in the morning."

With a tender pressure of the hand and a fond look into her eyes, he took his leave, and returned to Arlington House, the country seat of his father, Sir Hugh Arlington.

Those were happy days for Ashley and Gypsy—days that seemed all too short-lived. For what is more difficult of computation than time, or what so elastic as an hour? The sky was blue and sunny. And then, as so often happens, a cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, showed itself above the horizon and threatened to mount even to the zenith where the sun shone.

One day Ashley Arlington received an anonymous communication that filled him with vague uneasiness. It couldn't be true, of course. But there the thing was, and it wouldn't let him rest. He was a true Englishman—honest, upright, open as the day—and a few days later he presented himself to Colonel Powyss.

The old warrior received him with cordiality, for he liked the

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young man, and had already given his consent to Ashley's engagement with his daughter. But something in the young man's face made him grow suddenly silent. He felt something was coming—something he had for years dreaded and feared. But he was prepared. With a courteous gesture, he motioned Ashley to a chair.

"You wish to speak with me," he said calmly. "The truth is in your face. Can I help you in any way?"

Ashley moved uneasily in his seat. It seemed difficult to begin. Finally he drew from his pocket a letter.

"Colonel Powyss," he said unsteadily, "I have received an anonymous letter which contains some reference to yourself. I have shown the letter to no one, nor have I even mentioned its existence or its purport. You are an older man than I, and it has required some little temerity on my part to bring myself to speak of it to you. But the light is always preferable to the dark, and Englishmen should be afraid neither to speak nor yet to listen. I will read the letter to you, only remarking that I place no credence in the statement it contains, and bring it to you for no other reason than that you should know you have an enemy of this sort—an enemy who has not even the courage to append his name to his accusation."

He paused and opened the letter. Colonel Powyss straightened himself. His splendid face and soldierly figure were well under control. But in his heart there was dread—shame—bitterness. The voice of Ashley, reading, fell on his ear, and he listened.

"DEAR SIR,—*I understand you are engaged to Miss Powyss, daughter of Colonel Powyss, of Powyss Hall, Warwickshire.*

If rumour also speak correctly, your father, Sir Hugh Arlington, is a gentleman who prides himself upon his lineage and the unimpeachable purity of his descent.

It might, therefore, save you much future annoyance and humiliation if I let you into a little secret which has for years been so jealously guarded by Colonel Powyss.

The lovely woman whose portrait hangs in the study at Powyss Hall was never the wife of its present owner, and—well, you can guess the rest. You may now see that Miss Gypsy Powyss is scarcely a fitting wife for an Arlington.

"ANON."

Ashley's voice had scarcely ceased before Colonel Powyss was on his feet. There was an angry light in his dark eyes that boded ill for someone.

"Let me see the letter!" he demanded.

Ashley handed it to him without hesitation. Colonel Powyss critically scanned the handwriting, but it was evident from the first that it was quite unknown to him. He passed the letter back with a baffled gesture.

Ashley took it, quietly folded it in two, and dropped it into the fire which burnt in the grate. The Colonel watched him.

"Ashley, my lad," he said, touched deeply by the action, "you are a worthy son of your noble father. I wish I could tell you everything—everything. But I cannot do that, neither to you nor to any living creature. Can you be content if I give you my word, as a gentleman and a soldier, that this letter is a lie?"

He looked steadily into the young man's eyes. Ashley held out his hand.

"I never doubted it, sir," he said.

"Thank you."

Both men had risen, but now, as though by common consent, they resumed their seats. After a brief pause, the Colonel commenced to speak.

"It is more than probable," he said, "that your anonymous correspondent, finding you quite unmoved, may write again. If that, too, fail, he may even write to your father. I am bound to admit that, at present, I can produce no document to refute this false statement.

"I think, therefore, that I had better procure the necessary papers from India to show that I was legally married. I am rather afraid, however, that this may occupy some time, since I must also admit that my marriage was a secret one. Briefly, the facts are these: Little more than twenty years ago, while stationed in India, I first met the lady who soon after became my wife. I was only a captain then, and she—a governess.

"You start? Yes, she was a governess. But she was also the daughter of a greater house than the one in which she served. Ruin had come o that house, through the recklessness and extravagance of its male members, and she—a lovely, innocent girl—was sent out penniless into a world that cares little for the fate of such human sacrifices. What wonder that she dropped the name that spelt disgrace and adopted a better and a purer—the name her dead mother had borne!

"And I—well, it is an old story. Love is quick to grow, and in less than three short months, she had promised to become my wife. But my father was a man of strong prejudices. Blood was the one essential in his strict code. I knew him well enough to feel convinced that to marry a governess, even though that governess were a lady, would be to excite his anger and probably involve me in disinheritance.

"Do not misunderstand me. Had there been no other way, I would willingly have relinquished my expectations in that quarter. But I should spend many years in India, and I argued that a secret marriage might serve to link us together until such time as I could overcome the scruples and prejudices of my father.

"So one lovely morning, we went separately to a little English church among the hills in that land of many races, and were quietly married by an old priest. His own fee and that of the witnesses was sufficient to insure the secrecy of the ceremony. In one house there was some speculation as to the mysterious disappearance of a governess, but conjecture was always wide of the truth and the subject lost its interest before the orthodox nine days were half over. We had a pretty little cottage in one of the lovely valleys among the hills, and no one guessed the truth until our little Gypsy was born. And even *him* I pledged to secrecy. So the time went by, till Gypsy was just a year old. And then—then—I lost her."

A grey shade came into the Colonel's face as he uttered the last words. It was plain that some strong emotion was stirring within him. Ashley Arlington felt touched. Rising from his seat he went softly over to the Colonel's chair and took one hand in his.

"Colonel Powyss," he said, "I esteem you above all men. Thank you for your confidence. Good-bye."

A moment later and he was gone. Colonel Powyss heard his departing footsteps and a deep groan escaped his lips.

"Would to God that were all!" he said hoarsely. "How can I tell him that the truth—the truth—is worse, if possible, than the lie he has heard?"

He bowed his head upon his hands and let his thoughts go back to that far-off time when his little daughter was born. Yes, someone had found out his secret then. A brother-officer—one, Rupert Rivers—while strolling among the hills, had stumbled upon him as he came out of his cottage in the valley.

He had always disliked Captain Rivers, and it galled him to prefer a request of any kind. But many things were involved, and he did it. Rivers acquiesced readily enough, and, for a time, matters went on as before. And then, one day, when his little Gypsy was just a year old, he received a blow that well-nigh bereft him of reason.

Picking his way along the valley one dark night, he found no light in the little window to welcome him. No footfall responded to his knock, no soft words fell on his ear. The cottage was as dark as the valley, and a great fear came into his heart.

Forcing the door he went in, groping his way to the little sitting-room that had been to him a very paradise for nearly two years. A little baby-girl softly sobbing on the floor. And a letter.

Yes, a letter—stained and blotted as though with many tears. She had brooded long over his unwillingness to boldly proclaim her his lawful wife, forgetful that this very unwillingness was for her sake as much as for his. And brooding had bred suspicion, and suspicion distrust. He was ashamed of her. She would go away.

Someone had been kind to her, had sympathised with her

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in her loneliness, and she was going away with—his brain reeled as he read the words—with *him*. Could it be true? Oh, why had she not told him she was lonely? The hours he had spared her were few, he knew, but she had not realised how difficult it was for him to slip away from headquarters and come to her. With whom had she gone? She had not said. Was it Rupert Rivers?

He must find out. Early the next morning he went to the railway station. Yes, a lady, accompanied by a gentleman, had left the day before. They thought the lady answered to the description he gave, but they couldn't be sure about the gentleman. Then, with white drawn face, he went to the barracks. Lieutenant Fernley was the first officer he met. Captain Powyss put his question and received the reply without flinching. Captain Rivers had obtained leave of absence for a week. Then it was he. But who was this coming in at the door? Rupert Rivers himself! Captain Powyss looked bewilderingly into the other's smiling face. Then, without a word, he drew him out of earshot.

"My wife!" he demanded, in a hoarse whisper, "Tell me—what have you done with her? Tell me, or, by Heaven, I will kill you as I would a dog!"

And Rivers had slowly taken the cigar from between his lips and had looked in blank amazement into his accuser's face.

"Powyss," he said, "what on earth do you mean? Is anything wrong, old chap? Tell me! Don't look like that."

"Then it wasn't you?"

Once more Powyss looked searchingly, dully, into the other's face. Then he turned away with a groan. He could think no more. Back to the little cottage in the valley, to his pretty little baby-girl. And the sight of her, innocent, helpless, motherless, had wrung the tears from his eyes. Snatching the frail form in his arms, he sobbed over it as only a strong man sobs. And then he grew calmer and quieter.

It was not difficult to find a good ayah for the little girl, and the cottage in the valley was still kept on. But his wife never came back. Once, when on a visit to England, he had confessed the whole miserable story to his father. At first the latter had been very angry, but the realisation of his son's sorrow and humiliation soon touched a tender spot in the old man's heart, and he had forgiven him.

It *was* a miserable story. But, at least, they had been legally married, and this anonymous letter was an infamous lie. It was his duty now to prove it such, if only for his daughter's sake. Her mother had carried with her the certificate of their marriage, and, hitherto, he had seen no need to supply himself with a copy. But he must do so now. The next day he summoned his solicitor, and communicated his wishes in the matter. Cable messages were dispatched, and, later, a trusty agent. And when, at the end of six months, the latter returned, he brought with him—nothing. The little church among the hills had been burnt down five years before, and all its registers destroyed.

Search as they might, no trace could be found of the two witnesses, and the old priest had long since been dead. Plan after plan had been resorted to, effort after effort made, but Colonel Powyss' marriage was without record, save for that old-time certificate that his wife had carried with her on the day of her flight. What had become of her? Was she alive? He did not know, but, even if she were, she would probably be the last person to come within his reach.

And then another anonymous letter came for Ashley Arlington, and, with it, a covert threat that, should he still disregard the matter, the writer would appeal to Sir Hugh.

Almost in despair, the Colonel went from one place to another, finding nothing, yet always seeking for what he did not find. And then a new and unforeseen event occurred that changed both retrospect and prospect and sent a shaft of light streaming through the darkness of the years that had gone between.

It all happened in a few minutes. A dark night and the heavy tramp, tramp of men who carry a burden coming through the garden. Colonel Powyss opened the sliding door of his private study and looked out. Seeing his tall figure, silhouetted in the doorway, the bearers made towards him.

"A gentleman, sir—thrown from his horse and dragged along the road. We don't think he's dead, sir, so thought you'd let us bring him in here, while we fetch the doctor."

The Colonel opened the door wider and stepped back. There was a couch in the room, and upon it the men put their burden. Colonel Powyss looked down on the white face. The eyes slowly opened and looked up into his.

"Good Heavens!" he gasps. "Not here—not here—anywhere but here!"

"Rivers!"

"Go away. Where are the men? Tell them to take me away from this house. Oh!"

Colonel Powyss needed no doctor to tell him the man was dying.

"Rivers, old fellow," he said gently, "I'm afraid your time's come. Meet it like a man and a soldier. Remember how we fought side by side in the old days. Remember——"

"Stop! I wish to God I could forget! I remember—I remember how I tempted that innocent young wife of yours, till I even made her believe that wrong was right and right wrong. I remember how she ran away with me, and how, before the train had reached its destination, the horror, the revolting horror of what she was doing, came upon her and made her strong again. I remember how she spurned me when she alighted on the platform, and bade me go back to my regiment. She could never return, she said. She had forfeited all in her weakness, her folly. She must go back to the life she led before she met you. And she did go back, as pure as she was then—I swear it!—and for aught I know she is a governess to this day.

"Once I saw her, quite by accident, and renewed my old fascination. But she treated me with contempt.

"Then I told her of you and of her daughter, and threatened to ruin her daughter's happiness if she did not come to me. But still she spurned me. And then—then I wrote those anonymous letters. I can't say much more. She made me mad when she left me standing like a fool on that station platform. I went back to the regiment, and met you. She had made a fool of me, but I hid it from everyone. I don't know where she is now. I don't—I can't see you, Powyss. The light's going down or something. Give us your hand before I go.

"Say you forgive me, old comrade. They're calling the roll, and my name comes next. Stop the drums. I can't hear your orders, Colonel. Your hand—quick!"

The struggle in the Colonel's breast was only a little less prolonged than in that of the dying man. His hand met that of his enemy and rested there. A grateful glance, a penitent sigh, and the soul of Rupert Rivers went to its account.

It was a week later, and Colonel Powyss was sitting on a chair in his little study. The day was warm and bright, and the door into the garden was slid half open. Many things were in the Colonel's mind, as he gazed up at the lovely,

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girlish face that looked down at him from the painted canvas. She had realised in time. Thank God for that! Oh, that he might find her. The eyes seemed to implore him as he looked into them.. How like her the picture was! He had had it painted from a photograph ten years before, and seemed never to tire of gazing at it. And since Rivers had made that confession to him, the face seemed to have become even more beautiful in his eyes. In a rush of tenderness, he stretched out his hand to the sweet face.

"My lost wife!" he said, as if imploring her. "Will she ever return?"

There was a sound behind him. Turning quickly, he saw, standing in the doorway, a woman, pale, grief-stricken, ill-clad, repentant. Speechless, he gazed at her, and she seemed to droop before him as though with shame. The lovely eyes filled with tears, and the head sank slowly on the thin breast. And then both speech and action returned to Colonel Powyss. With a cry he sprang towards her, and, sharply closing the door, folded her in his arms.

"Ruth," he said, "you have come back to me?"

"Do you want me after—after——"

"Hush, dear. After to-day is all the after we need think about. I know all I need know, and I desire to know no more. Want you, Ruth? Of course I want you."

The woman laid her head on his breast and began to cry.

"I don't deserve it," she sobbed. "I wouldn't have come back now, only *he* threatened my little Gypsy."

"He is dead." The Colonel spoke the words slowly.

"Dead?"

"Yes, he died in this very room no more than a week ago. He told me all, and—and I forgave him."

For some minutes there was silence, and then she said:

"I managed to get along in my old occupation as governess until a year ago. And then I had a severe illness, and grew very poor—dreadfully poor—and——"

"Hush, hush, Ruth! Let us talk no more about it. Come upstairs with me. I think I can manage it without your being seen. And then, when you have changed your dress and removed the traces of travel, we will go and see Gypsy."

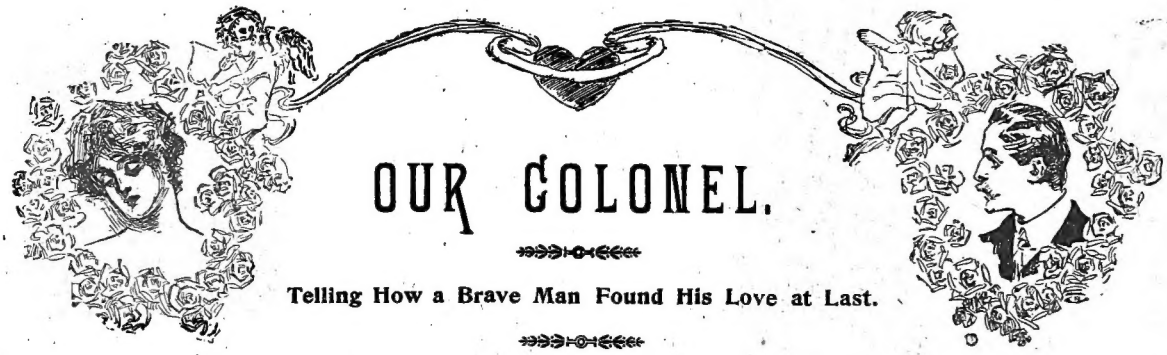
And, an hour later, Gypsy's arms were clinging about her mother's neck, and the Colonel could do nothing but gaze at the two with undisguised affection. He told Gypsy that he had been mistaken, that her mother had not died as he had imagined, but had suffered many things in the years of their enforced separation.

But of Rupert Rivers and his fatal fascination, he told neither her nor any living creature.

And when Gypsy Powyss and Ashley Arlington stood together at the altar and voiced the vows that were to unite them for ever, the Colonel's long-lost wife formed a conspicuous figure in the group.

For returning loveliness had come with returning happiness, and many were heard to declare that she was "a finer woman at forty than most women at twenty-five."

Walter J. Mowbray.



OUR COLONEL.

Telling How a Brave Man Found His Love at Last.

"OH, here comes our colonel! Isn't he splendid?" Thus spoke my wife.

"Whose colonel?" said I; and, without awaiting a reply, added: "What! this fellow?"

My tone was a little contemptuous; for, though Agnes and I are so secure in each other's affection that not the slightest taint of vulgar jealousy has touched our lives, all the world knows how it grates a little on a certain one of our constituent parts—self-love, perhaps—when the fact is revealed that the contemplation of our image, as the one big image, and the acceptance of our perfections as the sum of earthly excellence, do not shut out from that somebody's eyes other images, with their attendant attractions.

Thus, my wife's complimentary adjective "splendid" prompted the derogatory tone of my remark regarding the gentleman who was approaching, though the brief survey I made of the object himself certainly did not justify any word of slight.

As the colonel passed, his eye rested momentarily on my wife's face with the well-bred glance of interest an appreciative man is apt to give to female beauty—for Agnes is very handsome, coming of a handsome family—I summed up his outward presentment as well as the short time would allow.

Not over medium height, a somewhat spare, but compact, sinewy figure, erect and soldierly walk, quiet, dark grey eyes—a face that looked young, despite touches of grey in the hair. In the brief glimpse some other look in the face struck me—that of a man of force, of nerve, of one who had suffered, who had met boldly, or would so meet, if called upon, trouble, danger, death.

"He looks like a gentleman. Who is he? Whose colonel?" said I, breaking the silence.

Agnes laughed.

"I don't know who he is. Helen and I call him our colonel, because he looks so much like a soldier. He lives in the next street, I think, as he passes every day. We have made a guess that he is a soldier. I don't know why, except that he seems different from other people. Perhaps he is a general."

Here the subject dropped, our conversation turning to the more personal and practical matter of birthday presents for the children, the search for which had brought us out together.

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No further mention was made of the colonel, and, in the absorption of business, he had passed from my mind, when, several months after my first view of him, there was a second meeting which brought him into closer relations.

Just in the dusk of the Spring evening my wife, her sister Helen, and myself, were standing on a street corner awaiting a tram to take us homeward. Agnes and I were in close conversation about some domestic matter, Helen a foot or two from us.

Suddenly there was a slight scream. Turning, I saw Helen's face, white in the growing shadow, a rough-looking man quite close to her, then—what was it?

"Good Heavens!" cried Helen, "the Bible is John's."

Something shot between them, and the man went down with a thud, as if a thunderbolt had struck him. Then a flash in the dim light, a smothered "Oh!" and my startled senses told me that a knife had been driven home somewhere.

This was all instantaneous. Instinctively I sprang forward and struck with all my force the man who had the knife, with the satisfactory result of seeing him go down. Then a rush of people, a closing in on the group, hurried words, a rough seizure of the prostrate men, and, in course of time, an elucidation of the mystery.

Two drunken roughs had crossed the street, and in passing, purposely or otherwise, one had rudely pushed against Helen. At the same instant, a gentleman coming the other way was abreast of the party, and had promptly knocked the ruffian down. The latter's companion, with the murderous instinct of his class, immediately drew a knife and struck full at the breast of the intruder, who, fortunately, by a quick drawing back into a defensive attitude, received the thrust in his arm.

The stranger stood quietly, clasping with his right hand his wounded left arm, until the assailants were in process of being carried off by the police, when he asked if someone would be kind enough to tie a handkerchief tightly round the arm "Above the wound," he said, in as self-possessed a tone as if the cut were a mere scratch.

Helen sprang forward first, and then I saw clearly the gentleman's features. It was on my lips to say "It is the colonel," for he it was.

There was a gleam in his eyes, a look, weak as his paleness showed he was becoming, of the man ready and accustomed to face danger.

And Helen's eyes—they were literally stars, soft, glowing stars. Helen admires true courage, and the colonel's introduction in this heroic guise brought the colouring of romance.

The result of our exciting meeting was that, finding the gentleman was only temporarily boarding with strangers I insisted on taking him to my own residence, where, duly installed, the medical attendance and nursing necessary in what proved an ugly and troublesome wound ensued.

On reaching the house we made a formal introduction of ourselves to each other, he handing me his card, on which was written in a bold hand "Roger Markham."

While the doctor was dressing the cut I noticed several scars, one on the shoulder, evidently from a gunshot wound; and a reference to them as indicating military service brought out the quiet answer that he had been in the Army as we had supposed.

"That scar you see there was received in one of the skirmishes that were scarcely battles but more a series of hand-to-hand fights just before the surrender. It was from a pistol-shot fired by a mere boy, whom, in a second, my horse trampled down. It is a sad memento to me, the boy looked so young and bright and handsome; but the shot made my bridle arm useless, and I could not check my horse. I would have saved him if I could. His face haunts me as of one uselessly sacrificed on the very threshold of peace."

In subsequent conversation, during our guest's convalescence, we gathered many interesting incidents of raid and battle and siege, though so modestly given, so far as any part he himself had taken in scenes of daring and blood, one might have supposed him a mere spectator. In answer to questions as to his rank, we learnt that he was colonel in the 71st Lancers.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Agnes to me that night. "Mark the infallible instinct of woman."

As time passed this unerring feminine insight elucidated another fact. It was that our colonel—for we felt that he was "ours" now, weak and wounded as he was—had fought another fight, and had lost, and yet conquered.

In the battle royal, a woman's beauty and tender care had proved weapons strong enough to subdue the bold heart that had made its way into the very citadel of her own breast.

The situation became patent, and a month before the colonel left us to resume the routine of boarding-house life, the fact that he and Helen loved each other was tacitly accepted by our circle, and it pleased us.

After he left us, his nightly visit was regarded as a part of the course of life.

Now, what demon of circumstance possessed me I know not, but one night I remarked that such and such a battle was one of the fiercest in the whole war.

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"Ah," said the colonel, "I don't like to think of that time. It brings up that young, gallant face—strangely familiar it grows, too. And, by the way, I have the boy's Bible at my rooms; it came into my hands after the skirmish. I wish so much I could find his relatives!"

"Has it no name in it?"

"It had, but the name is partly obliterated by a splash of blood. The leaves are cut as by a sabre, and I judge the stroke that cut them wounded the boy also. You can see 'John,' and underneath, 'from his mother,' that is all."

I noticed Helen's face pale a little as she asked in a low voice if he wouldn't bring the book down some time.

"Certainly," he said.

On the next night, after some little conversation, Markham, rising and going to where Helen sat, took a seat beside her, remarking:

"I brought this memento with me, Helen."

He unloosed the wrapper carefully, and in a reverent manner, as though it were something from a grave, handed the volume to Helen.

From my absorption in the financial column of the paper, I was startled by a sound that was a wail and a shriek combined—the cry of a breaking heart.

"Heavens, Roger! there is blood between us! It is John's."

The colonel caught the fainting girl as she fell. Mechanically I picked up the book, and Agnes and myself stared at the page with its smear of blood and handwriting of the dead mother, so familiar to both.

The situation was dramatic—utter silence broken at last by Markham, who, in a strained voice, suggested that we should remove the unconscious girl to her room. We carried her up, and stood silently until the restoratives Agnes applied began to show their effect, when I took Markham by the arm and led him downstairs.

"This is unutterably horrible!" he said.

In a few words I explained to him that John Bernard, whose name blood—his own, perchance—had blurred, was the only brother of Helen and Agnes, who, but six months before the war ended, getting involved in trouble reflecting on his honour, had joined a Boer regiment at the front, and that, in spite of persistent inquiry and search, nothing had been heard of him since his last letter in March.

His fate was a tender subject with us, and almost unconsciously we had hoped he might yet report to us. We had heard of such cases. But this awful token settled the matter. That the circumstances had not been mentioned sooner was because family pride shrunk from revealing the cloud which had been brought on it, hence all that had been said was that a brother had been lost in the war.

In a few moments the colonel, pale and agitated, took his leave.

In the morning he called. He and Helen had an interview in which we afterwards learnt, while heroically confessing that her heart was entirely his, she told him that with the ghost of her dead brother between them, and the feeling that through him, though unavoidably, the death-blow may have been given, there was nothing for them but to part.

Within a week I read aloud from the list of passengers on a Liverpool steamer the name "Roger Markham."

Helen, just a shade paler, said:

"He has gone, then. He said he would leave as soon as he could settle some affairs. He——"

Here her voice broke as she realised that the severance which would be for all time was actually accomplished, and with an agonised cry, "How can I bear it?" rushed from the room.

What the poor, gentle, torn, but stout heart went through in the lonely hours of that night none but Heaven can know.

The doom of parting had been fixed, but while one city or one continent held them, a word, a tick of the telegraph wire, would have brought him to her side, or her to his—at least in that hour when Death should come to bridge the chasm and lay the ghost that barred their communion in life.

But Helen was strong and brave, and fought a gallant fight with herself, no trace showing to the world of the terrible strife. To us there was an added gentleness, a paler cheek, a deeper look in the soft, dark eye, but there was also that constant activity, an increasing devotion to the daily duties of life that both showed the true, brave, healthy woman, and took away all fear that she would fade beneath the blow which might have crushed a more fragile nature.

What of him—the wanderer?

No tidings reached us to tell how his high spirit and gallant heart fretted and chafed; only at intervals there came, in packets addressed to me, with no scrap of writing within, a curiously-shaped leaf, a shell of exquisite tint, a lustrous stone, a quaintly-carved fan—tokens that his restless feet had touched the far-off shores of India and China, and trodden through African wastes.

Once a huge lion-skin was sent to me, and we knew whose hand had laid the forest king low.

Outwardly these tokens moved Helen but little; we could only read in the glow of her face a sort of loving satisfaction in the knowledge that *he* yet lived and—remembered; and later, after an event which I am about to mention, we saw an occasional gleam of something born of the whisperings of Hope to her hungry soul.

* * * * *

Two years to the very day after the colonel's departure in the hot June afternoon, the door of my private office was quietly opened and closed, and I heard a man's footstep approaching my desk, which was in a corner of the room.

I sat with my back to the door, thinking in a dreamy way of the drama of whose closing the day was the anniversary. As the noise of the steps ceased I turned with a start, and there surely stood a ghost.

Gaunt, with unkempt hair and beard, in a foreign, half-ragged costume, the handsome face hollowed and haggard, but a live, proud look in the dark eyes, by all that was good or bad, it was John Bernard, or his ghost.

My eyes must have expressed my mental uncertainty—never a word could I say.

A smile spread over the worn features, and my visitor, moving to the desk, said, in a quiet, repressed voice:

"Don't be scared—it is John."

Putting his hand into his breast-pocket and producing a package, which he laid on the table, he continued, in tones with an intense ring in them:

"There is the paper they said I stole, and with it the confession, signed, sealed, and witnessed by the American Consul at Rio, of the man who did steal it. I got on his track just after peace was declared, and I swore to myself that never should word be heard from me at home, living or dead, unless it could be with honour restored. And here I am, worn out, dirty, ragged, but with my name clear."

Here the poor fellow, weak and nervous, burst into tears.

I, who had as yet uttered no word, jumped up, threw my arms round him, and am ashamed—no, *not* ashamed—to say, strong, big, hulking fellow as I am, that I could not speak a word for the next five minutes.

But we recovered our equanimity, and after a free and divided use of my handkerchief—an article John was temporarily short of—got ourselves more into the appearance of men.

As may be imagined, I was moved by more than the mere return of John and the fact of his redemption from disgrace.

A thousand bewildering possibilities loomed up, and John, the colonel, and Helen, were so tangled in my thoughts that I was in doubt which to do first—go home, or start for the Continent. I startled the clerk in the outer office by calling out to him to run down quickly and get me a ticket for Paris.

"A what, sir?"

"Oh, a cab, I mean."

The day was not late, and John expressing a wish to drive first to Mr. Selwyn's, if that gentleman still lived, and give him the papers, we went there at once.

"I have brought you something, Mr. Selwyn," I said.

The banker glanced over the stolen paper, read the other intently, and, though he was evidently shocked to see the signature that of his former confidential clerk, the pleasure he

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felt in John's clearance and return was unmistakable, and the rough, hard-featured man of the world came near disgracing himself as badly as I had.

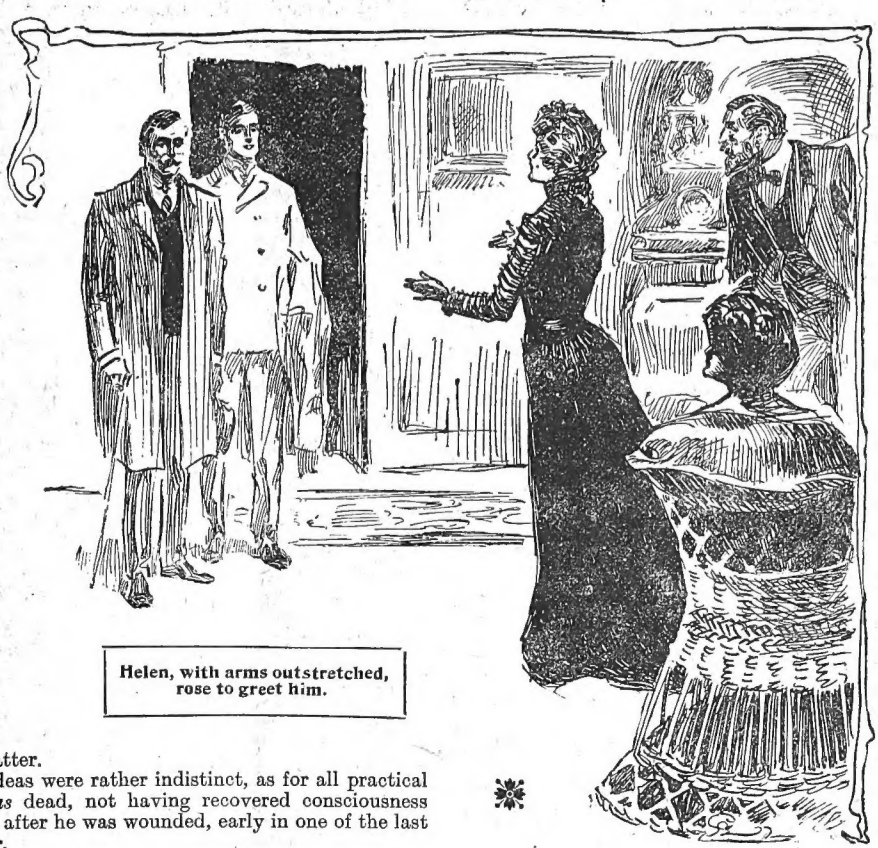
As fast as the cabby could take us home we went, and then ensued a scene not to be described.

My impression is that both Agnes and Helen swooned, while John and I demeaned ourselves in a very unmanlike manner.

Tempests, whether of Nature or of the human economy, cannot last; the reaction comes, and in due course we quieted down and listened to John's story.

Naturally, the part which was of most personal interest came first, and he told us how, by accident, as he lay in a small farmhouse, recovering slowly from wounds, he learnt who it was that, to shield himself, had wronged him; how, when scarcely able to drag himself along, he had struck the trail; how through weary days, which grew into months, he had followed the doubling tracks of his enemy, who, as though conscious of the sleuth-hound behind availed himself of every disguise and expedient to help his flight. At last, in Brazil, he had run him down.

After hearing this part of his story, handing John his Bible, which he recognised with open-eyed astonishment, and telling him that its return had convinced us he was dead, I led him to talk of his fighting career, and especially the closing portion of the latter.



Helen, with arms outstretched, rose to greet him.

He said his ideas were rather indistinct, as for all practical purposes he *was* dead, not having recovered consciousness for many hours after he was wounded, early in one of the last fights of the war.

"But!" broke in Helen, excitedly, "you remember just before you were wounded, and you saw who wounded you, did you not? And didn't you shoot somebody, and didn't somebody ride you down?"

"Why, you weren't there, were you?" said John, glancing inquisitively at his sister. "Yes"—turning round and showing his left cheek—"there's a mark of a hoof; somebody did ride me down. The fact is that, while the incidents of that day were most bewildering to me, there were some pictures stamped on my memory, never to be effaced. But among them all, when I try to recall those scenes, as I have hundreds of times in the lone night hours, comes up the figure of one man. He embodies all my ideas of a soldier—of war—and his face, as I saw it that day, haunts me. I am troubled with the thought that he was killed. I hope not; and if what I hope is true, I would give years of my life to know it."

Agnes and myself exchanged glances, while Helen's eyes had an untranslatable gleam—pride, hope, love, brightened, dimmed and softened them all at once.

In a low tone, she said, "Tell us of that day."

"Well, our men were posted behind a stone fence facing one of the country roads, along which the British were expected to march in an attempt to flank our forces. Behind us was a brigade, on which we were to fall back if attacked in force, or which would be thrown forward to help us.

"After waiting several hours, listening to the roar of artillery in the distance, suddenly a picket dashed in, calling out, 'Cavalry!' In a few minutes a cloud of dust rose on the road facing us. Our commandant ordered us to lie flat down, and thus hidden by the wall, the commandant posting himself behind a tree for observation, we waited.

"Nearer rolled the dust, and soon could be heard the sound of iron hoofs, then of voices, occasionally a careless laugh. I remember the merriment jarred on me, and I could not help feeling how much more like straight-out war it would be to stand up and let them see us. I suppose something must have attracted attention, for clear, sharp, and stern came the word 'Halt!'

"Immediately we were ordered to rise, aim, and fire. There before us, perhaps a hundred yards off, was a small body of horsemen, somewhere from fifty to a hundred, evidently a reconnoitring party. As the fire of three hundred Mausers belched on them one would have thought they would be swept clear away; but on the instant we were greeted with a return fire from carbines, and, amid the din, the order 'Charge!' rang out clear and distinct.

"Before we could reload they were upon us, over the low fence, slashing with their swords, and cutting their way right through us. I was back some twenty yards from the fence, excitedly trying to reload.

"Everything was in confusion—the confusion of hand-to-hand fighting. The time was only a few seconds, and one couldn't make many observations; but in that brief space I could not help noticing the officer in command of the enemy—I don't know his rank. He was the first over the fence, mounted on a splendid horse, and as he called to his men to follow him, his sword sweeping like lightning, his eyes aglow with the fire of battle, he reminded me of a picture I had seen of the god of

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war. In even that moment I was fascinated, and it flashed through my mind that a leader like that I would follow anywhere.

"Plunging, rearing, the rider sweeping his blade, bayonets flashing and pistol-shots rattling all about him, the horse came straight towards me.

"Instinctively I fired my pistol, without aim; the next instant the steed had trampled me down. Almost as I fell, I felt myself seized by the jacket and dragged along, and knew nothing more until I awoke in a small room in a farm house.

"I learnt afterwards that when the skirmish was over, our men had been hastily withdrawn, leaving the dead and wounded on the field.

"The kind people who cared for me told me that I had been carried there the night before, accompanied by an officer with his arm in a sling and suffering from several wounds. He didn't think I would recover, and had tried to find out my name, but there was nothing about me to indicate it. By-the-way, where did you get my Bible?"

Helen, incapable of speech, silently drew a little case from her breast, and handed it to John.

"Heavens, that is the man! He brought you the Bible—did he? Where is he?"

"I will tell you all about it in your room, John."

And I told him.

"Why, this is like a novel," said John. "The colonel—Helen, confound the man who kept me wandering over a continent to try to redeem my name, and thus separated two such noble souls! But you must fatten me up and get me well now. I have another mission."

The aspect of affairs was certainly improved; but with the fading out of the blood-splash that had separated her from her lover there came across Helen that shade of restlessness, that touch of unquiet, that betokens a mind ill at ease—a chafing against the decrees of silence and absence, which, bravely submitted to while they seemed just, were doubly hard to bear when the circumstance that enforced them no longer existed.

Many a consultation, in our anxiety about Helen, did Agnes and I hold as to how to discover Markham's whereabouts. To write to every British consul, to telegraph to every European hotel, to employ trained detectives—schemes without number did we devise and discuss, reckless of the financial ruin the expense would have entailed.

One night, towards bedtime, John, who had in his few weeks of rest recovered his condition and good looks, remarked, in a quiet voice:

"Well, I will bid you good-night and good-bye. To-morrow morning I leave for the Continent," stooping over Helen and kissing her tenderly. "Keep up your spirits, sister; I will bring him back to you."

"Why, John," I say, "how will you find him—where will you look for him?"

"I don't know," the young man responded; "but I *will* find him—my tracking experiences will serve me."

* * * * *

So on the morrow John went, and we settled down to our old life with this new disturbing element—waiting for news. Letters came regularly, but one after another summed up "no clue yet, but be patient."

At intervals came too, those reminders, anonymous but with no shadow of doubt as to their sender, from far-off climes. The wrappers were duly sent to John; but as the postmarks were sometimes months old and never the same, they were mere tokens of where the wanderer had been.

Ah, here was one from Algiers!—that was getting nearer—and I forthwith cabled John, "Algiers, September 5th," nothing more. In a week I had a wire which I didn't show even to my wife, from Algiers, "Left here a month ago; no trace yet."

On that very day a dainty little sketch of a face like an angel's came, and the postmark was "Rome." I cabled again, "Rome, September 28th."

The scent grew warmer, and even across the ocean I felt the hunter's blood astir in my veins. But this waiting was dreary.

Time rolled on. Not a message from John, except that, in a letter from Rome, whither he had gone on receiving my last dispatch, he said that he had struck a trail which was "very wide," and therefore uncertain, but which he hoped would sooner or later narrow down to success, and that he was about starting for Vienna first and Paris afterwards.

A month or so later—it was early in December—on entering my office, I saw a cablegram on my desk.

For the first time I was afraid; something told me this was a message of life or death. But I tore off the envelope.

"*Found. Ill, but recovering. No danger. Start home in a week. Will write.*"

Had a thousand electric needles been stuck in me, I couldn't have been more excited than I was by that message of life. Did I jump or knock over the chairs, or what? I don't know.

I was in a whirl of excitement, and the clerks were assuredly justified in the belief they may have had of lunacy, intoxication, or similar explanation of lost equilibrium in the usually staid head of the concern.

I couldn't bring my mind to business. I must have time to think how to break this news to Helen. She is strong against grief; perhaps joy may overcome her.

I took a day's holiday, planning over and over what I should say; and, after all, when I entered the house at the usual hour, at the very first glance at my face, Helen's greeting was:

"You have had news. What is it? Don't be afraid to tell me."

I simply handed her the message. She read it.

"From Paris? I knew it would come sooner or later."

Retaining the paper, she looked at me with such a look as can come only in the eyes of a true, brave woman, fed with the food of undying faith.

There is no creature made of God stronger than a good, hopeful and trusting woman!

There was nothing now but to await the end. The wanderer was ill, but there was the assurance "no danger." "Start in a week." We counted the days, the hours. "Will write." A letter would come first.

The letter did come, and this is it:

"DEAR RONALD.—I wrote you from Rome in October, just before leaving there, but too hurriedly to give you any details. From what I learnt during my stay, the colonel must have left on the very day I arrived. I could find no trace in my wanderings about day after day, and was feeling very desperate, when accidentally I strolled into the rooms of young Wiswall—you know he is there, and he is doing some good work, too. We were glad to see each other, and talked for hours about—well, everything, almost.

"Just as I was about going, he said, 'By-the-way, there was a good fellow here a week or two ago—though you don't know him, I expect—Markham, of London.' 'Markham—Roger Markham! The one man in all the world I want to see!' 'Well, he is gone, left—let me see—ten days ago for

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Vienna, or Paris, I don't know which, and I don't think he did himself; and, come to consider, I doubt if he cared. He said he was just passing away the time—intended strolling over the Continent a while before returning to England.

"The next day I was off to Vienna, where it is only necessary to say I met with no trace whatever, though I spent several weeks in the search. To Paris next, reaching there on November 21st. That is one of my calendar days hereafter.

"I felt very sick at heart, though, when I thought of the wilderness of civilisation I was about to try to penetrate, for I had learnt that this search for anybody in big cities isn't like my old trailing experience. How should I start? Ah, the police—they keep track of strangers! Accident, or Providence, solved the difficulty sooner than gendarmes or a system of espionage.

"On the very night of my arrival, restless and disinclined to sleep, I wandered out, strolling listlessly along. The clocks were striking twelve, when suddenly there was a rumbling sound, a glare, the sound of rushing feet, cries of 'Fire!' The excitement stirred me; I would see how they managed such things in Paris. I ran swiftly through the nearest streets in the direction of the light, and on turning the corner, there burst on my view a sheet of flame—a tall building all afire, only a row of windows at one end visible—several hundred people moving about aimlessly, or staring helplessly at the blaze—policemen shouting orders, women and children half dressed, evidently awakened just in time for escape; not an engine near, though there were sounds of rushing wheels in the distance.

"I stood excited and fascinated. Suddenly a scream—a woman's voice crying out that her child, her little Viola, was left behind. Almost as she speaks a child's face appears at a window in the far end of the burning building; a lovely little scared face framed in curls, with the fierce flames scarcely three feet off. A thrill of horror goes through the increasing crowd—no human help seems possible. Oh, for a ladder, but before any can reach the spot, even if only minutes, hope would be gone.

"All at once, from the fascinated, frozen crowd—frozen with horror, in face of the burning heat—a figure springs forth—flies, it seems to me, towards the narrow, unburnt space of wall at the end—the one yet untouched row of windows, across which in a few seconds the blaze would sweep. Then swiftly climbing, seizing on every projection of balcony and cope, drawing himself up with incredible agility, this figure—man it must be, and yet what being of mortal mould could climb by the side of that seething flame without literally roasting—moved, almost seemed to glide up the wall, and amid breathless silence hurls himself in through the open window.

"Then cries break forth. Of what use? It is two lives instead of one. In a moment the man appears at the window. Heavens, as I live, the face I saw on the battlefield, the look of daring no danger could daunt, the light of battle in the eyes, but nobler, higher, as this fight to save was grander than the fight to kill! That face, the colonel's, as it showed from the window, I shall never forget. I find him, but only to see him die, for the fire already licks the lower windows, and no ladder, no rope, no help.

"Remember this all takes place in seconds.

"The colonel throws a swift glance towards the ground, as though measuring the chances for a leap, then disappears. What ages of horror the seconds seem! He comes again; steps out of the window backward, takes hold of the sill with his hands, and feeling his way with his feet, deliberately, as it looks, commences the descent step by step.

"The people, now swelled to a multitude, hold their breath, gazing with strained eyes at the spectacle, expecting momentarily to see the brave man succumb to the terrible pain and drop to the pavement with his burden, for he comes not alone—he has a child with him. With a sheet snatched from a bed he had fastened the little one close to his side that would be unexposed to the heat, with her face towards him.

"But he gallantly endures the frightful heat. Now his feet touch the top of the first-storey window; below him all is ablaze—his clothing is on fire!

"With a quick motion, throwing one arm round the child, and putting his left hand before his eyes, he makes a backward spring, lands fairly on his feet, clear of the blaze, totters, falls.

"A dozen hands seize him, coats are thrown over his burning clothes he is dragged out; strong arms swiftly but gently carry the double burden away from the blistering heat; the child is loosened and snatched to her mother's arms unhurt, not a hair of her head scorched; while he, with hair singed, face blistered and blackened, the flesh showing raw and red from shoulder to finger-ends, and down to his very feet, all along his left side, where the clothing was burnt off, lies giving directions calmly and quietly.

"And what a scene it was! After the first simultaneous shout that burst forth as the saver and the saved touched the ground, a hush of awe settled on the multitude, broken only by the sobs of women and the husky voices of men praying to the good God and all the saints that the life of the brave man might be spared.

"The engines, now arrived, had all the space near the fire to themselves, and when the maimed form was lifted into the ambulance, a thousand feet followed reverently to the hospital, and there, until the sun rose, men and women waited to hear the tidings of life or death.

"I accompanied the ambulance, and on mentioning that the gentleman was an Englishman and a friend, I was admitted. I stood silently while the surgeons dressed the wounds, trying to gather from their faces the decree of Fate. When the work was completed, the colonel asked in steady tones if his injuries were serious. 'Fear not to tell me,' he said. 'Death and I have met too often for him to have any terrors for me.'

"A few whispered words between themselves, and one, a man grown venerable in practice, leaning over, said: 'In nine cases out of ten I should say death, but your nerve and self-possession are in your favour. You must have held your breath, as no signs show of internal injury. Are you a soldier, sir?' 'I have seen service.' Impulsively I sprang to the old surgeon's side. 'Will good news hurt him?' 'It may do him good.'

"Turning to the cot, I knelt down and said, 'Colonel Markham, I have come to take you home. I am Helen's brother. She is well and is waiting for you.' Not a word, but in his eyes 'the light that never was on sea or land.'

"The next morning the old surgeon said, 'He will get well, I think, because he has willed it; but it will take all his strength to stand the shock.' I determined to say nothing until I knew certainly the best or worst. To-day it is announced that in about a week he will be in a condition to travel, and, if we get him home safely, and you want to see a hero, I will show you one.

"JOHN."

* * * * *

On Christmas Eve a hansom stopped at our door. The bell rang. Two men walked in—one, a handsome youth, with exultant tread; one, scarred, with stiff, slow step, but erect in mien. From our circle a woman rushed forth with a face as of one transfigured.

Albert Allen.

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A MARRIAGE - - AND A WILL.

The Story of a Misunderstanding.

"THE young scoundrel!" shouted Uncle Philip, waving the sheet of notepaper frantically in the air. "Not one penny of my money shall he have! I'll send for my lawyer this instant, and alter my will! Confound it! I'll send for Ethel, and see."

He sat down and rang the bell violently.

"My niece," he said shortly to the servant, and buried himself again in the letter.

Happily, at this moment, the desired personage floated in, a jaunty hat set back on her wind-tossed curls, and her fair young face all aglow with good spirits and healthful exercise. It was not an easy task—even for old Uncle Philip—to dash all that bloom and brightness aside, perhaps for ever.

"My dear," he commenced feebly, "I—I—confound the young reprobate! He was not worthy of you."

The young girl put a pair of soft arms round his neck, and murmured some cooing words, meantime letting one white hand wander slowly but surely towards the letter. A moment later she held it triumphantly out of his reach, and, with a merry laugh plunged into its contents.

Uncle Philip watched her, half curiously, half despairingly, as she read, but when she turned the page, he turned away with a heart-felt groan.

"It's come!" he gasped, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "For goodness' sake, Ethel, don't faint!"

Ethel did not faint, but all the bloom vanished from the sweet face, and the letter fell from her shaking hand.

It had only one brief paragraph:

DEAR UNCLE.—*I married the daughter of your old friend, Mr. Richards, yesterday; and I can truthfully say that I have never seen a fairer or sweeter bride.*

That was all, but it was enough, when, not two months before, the writer had placed, with his own hands, a sparkling engagement-ring on little Ethel Stringer's finger! It glittered there now; but Ethel drew it off, with a look like a wounded animal in her brown eyes. She sent it to him with her congratulations and not one word of reproach. But not so with Uncle Philip. He gave his nephew a piece of his mind, and the next day called Ethel into his library and showed her his new will.

"Everything goes to you, my dear," he said, chuckling complacently. "And for that dishonourable rascal of a nephew, let him take his fair bride to his sanctimonious father. I wash my hands of them both."

"Oh, Uncle!" faltered poor, tender-hearted Ethel imploringly; and then she stopped, stifled by her tears.

"Well, what now?" queried Uncle Philip, resignedly. "Women never are satisfied. Speak up, my dear, speak up."

"If you would only forgive him," said Ethel, pleadingly. "Perhaps he loved Mr. Richards' daughter——"

"Love be hanged!" broken in Uncle Philip explosively. "I beg your pardon," he added, "but love is no excuse for dishonour. He talked to you of love when he was here."

Ethel winced perceptibly.

"He can never get along without your help," she continued.

"I know it," said the old man grimly; "and I am glad of it."

"He is your only brother," pleaded Ethel piteously.

Uncle Philip blew his nose with savage emotion.

"I told him that I'd wash my hands of him if he adopted the ministry as a profession," he growled, "and I kept my word."

"But you'll forgive his son," said Ethel coaxingly.

"No, I will not!" replied the old gentleman emphatically. "My money goes to you—I'll not leave him a penny."

Ethel drew her graceful figure up to its full height. Her dark eyes were flashing ominously.

"Do you think I will take your money?" she asked. "I—your niece by adoption—rob your own brother's son? If you will not leave it to them, you cannot leave it to me; for I refuse to take it. I thank you for all that you have done for me; but, when you are dead, I will not have your money. I would sooner die than touch it!"

That night Uncle Philip died—"of heart disease," the doctor said, "caused by too much excitement."

About a week after his death, the chief mourners gathered in the great, oak-panelled library, to hear the reading of the will. The lawyer rattled the papers on the desk with nervous fingers, and a dead silence had fallen upon the anxious-faced group. It was evident that they were awaiting someone. Suddenly a tall, determined-looking young man rose. With a brief apology he left the room and inquired of a servant for Miss Stringer. He was told that she was in her boudoir, and hastened there, but, for a moment stood petrified in the doorway. Ethel was standing, with her face half turned towards him, by a secret panel that she had just slid from the old wainscoted wall. In her hand she held a sealed document, to which she was about to apply a lighted match.

"It is the safest way," she murmured. "He is gone, and they will never know."

Suddenly the already scorched paper was snatched from her hand. With a low cry, she turned and saw her false lover, Walter Clifton.

For a moment he stood looking at her in horrified silence, and then he broke out in a torrent of passionate, angry words.

"So this is why you sent me my ring!" he said hoarsely. "You feared the old man might disinherit me, and you forgot your honour in your greed for gold. Take the will," and he flung it at her feet, "and the gold if it will serve to satisfy you."

He turned on his heel and was about to leave the room, but, on second thoughts, came back.

"I came here to make an explanation," he said coldly, "and even your falseness shall not deter me.

"Knowing my uncle to be opposed for some reason to my father's profession," he continued, "I never thought it necessary to mention the fact that I was following the same calling. In my last letter to him I thoughtlessly remarked that I had married the daughter of his old friend, meaning that I had read the marriage service over her. I hope you understand."

He would have said more, but the girl's white face alarmed him. This last startling announcement had been too much for her; clasping her hands, she swooned away.

The young man rang peremptorily for her maid, and then, not daring to trust himself in her presence, rushed away.

"Miss Stringer is ill," he explained to the impatient assembly in the room below.

But a moment later the brisk little maiden rushed in, her cap all awry, and the scorched document held tightly in her hand. The lawyer's eyes sparkled as he took it.

"It is the missing will," he said, and then he checked himself and sent orders for Miss Stringer to make her appearance, if it were possible for her to come. Ten minutes more and the trembling, white-faced girl was almost carried in.

The lawyer stood up, with a preliminary cough that was echoed by an impatient murmur all through the room.

The old gentleman had left all his personal property, excepting a few trifling legacies to distant relatives, to his adopted niece, Ethel Stringer.

There was a dead silence for a moment after the sonorous voice of the lawyer ceased.

Then a tall young fellow rose and made his way through the mourners to the side of the newly-made heiress. "Ethel," he said, "I've been a brute. Can you ever forgive me?"

And Ethel hid her happy face on his shoulder; and, not long after, the young minister was married in reality.

B. Jephson.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

Told by the Decoy Herself.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

SYNOPSIS.

VIVIENNE D'ALTON, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam. Vivienne is greatly delighted at the news, and while she sails down the Rhine to meet her father, conjectures as to his appearance.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

Aunt Flora shows great annoyance that Vivienne is so concerned in the gentleman's death.

She and Vivienne leave Rotterdam for England.

On the passage across Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger whom Aunt Flora seems to wish to impress.

He announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

He does so, and relates how he was attacked in Rotterdam by persons whose evident intention was to rob him of the diamonds he carried about with him.

He is advised by his host to invest a large sum of money in the New Barbary Land Development Co., in which Mr. D'Alton is interested.

Some days later, Vivienne takes a surreptitious walk in the evening. She is amazed to see Viscount Broomville shadowed by the two birds of evil omen she had seen on the Harwich boat. The man is about to strike the Viscount when Vivienne utters a timely shriek of warning and thereby saves the Viscount from being murdered. The man is able to make his escape.

FOURTH EPISODE.

The Decoy Spreads her Net.

I BELIEVE all London was talking about our forthcoming reception. At least, Aunt Flora said so, and, judging by the wonderful amount of viands and flowers that were ordered for the occasion, it is certain that a good many tradesmen would be discussing it with pleasure.

Lady Windelmore spent most of her time in taking me to call upon her aristocratic friends, and my father certainly did a great stroke of business when he thought of invoking her aid, for I am sure that it was due to her influence, rather than to his money, that so many titled people accepted the invitations sent them, thus putting the stamp of success upon my *début* as a hostess.

Aunt Flora was less happy than she ought to have been, seeing that she was being kept in such luxury as many a princess might envy. She did not venture to be openly antagonistic to Lady Windelmore, but she never lost a chance of sneering at my social chaperon, and as I liked the Countess much better than I liked my putative aunt, it often happened that the latter and I did some verbal sparring, in which I always took her ladyship's part.

"I suppose it would be too much to expect such an aristocrat to take her *déjeuner* with us," was a remark made by Mrs. Sherwood when she joined my father and myself on the morning of the important day to which we had all looked forward with some anxiety.

"Her ladyship breakfasted with us yesterday," I retorted. "And if she wants to keep herself fresh for this evening, why shouldn't she?"

"Very true," put in my father. "Flora, you are not the sweet-tempered person I imagined you to be when I arranged for you to be my daughter's daily companion."

"Oh, father, please don't find fault!" was my hasty interjection. "You cannot expect anybody of Aunt Flora's age to be absolutely amiable, nor even congenial. Now, if you would get me a companion just fresh from school, like myself, I daresay Aunt Flora would be glad to be relieved of the worry I must be to her."

If I had wanted to pay Mrs. Sherwood off for being ill-natured, meddlesome, and sneering, I was certainly successful, for she was simply furious. But I was not prepared for the retaliating attitude she assumed

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Turning to me with a face which was absolutely livid with mortification, she said, in tones which showed she was putting a greater restraint upon her voice than upon her words:

"I suppose, Miss D'Alton, you intend that remark to be a veiled threat of dismissal. But be good enough to understand that nothing you can do or say will insure my departure from this house until I am ready to go. And perhaps it will be just as well to inform you that you will find it vastly to your own advantage to be civil to me."

Knowing that Mrs. Sherwood was no relation of ours, and that, therefore, she had no claim upon us, I considered her speech more than impertinent, but was both vexed and surprised when my father hastily added:

"And I think, Vivienne, that if you accept Flora's information as final, it will save considerable future awkwardness."

I certainly could not understand why my father permitted this woman's vulgar domineering, until it struck me that perhaps he was in love with her, and intended to make her absolute mistress of his hearth and home as soon as he had seen me married to the titled husband he was anxious to secure for me. However, if one stopped to worry over every inexplicable thing which occurs in our lives, one might always be worrying, and I resolved to concern myself no more about Mrs. Sherwood and her vagaries than was absolutely necessary.

To tell the truth, I was glad to escape from the breakfast-table, for I feared lest something should transpire about my last night's adventure, and, apart from my own objection to discovery, I had been urged by Lord Broomville to say not a word about the attack upon him which I had frustrated, as he thought there would be a better chance of discovering his pursuers if he showed no signs of being on the alert.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said my father, probably by way of changing the subject to a pleasanter atmosphere, "did I understand that you were going out with her ladyship this morning?"

"Yes, father," I answered brightly. "We promised to call upon the Hon. Mrs. Rogers. She is not well enough to come here this evening, but some visitors of hers are coming."

"Oh, indeed, who are they?"

"Just the kind of people you like me to invite. The two young ladies are both pretty and smart, and their brother has just inherited a huge fortune from an uncle whom he never saw."

"Well, I expect you will be able to make things pleasant for the young people, and if they are strangers to London, I daresay they are glad to be invited."

"They are simply overjoyed. In fact, Sophie and Maude, the two sisters, have never been to a really big party in their lives. The brother, Mr. Melrose, has seen a good deal of the world, but he was quite pleased when I asked him to come back to lunch with us."

"Clever girl! You do my hospitable instincts all the credit I expected. So we are to expect Mr. Melrose to lunch, eh?"

"Yes, and while he is here, I wish you would give him a little advice about investments. He said something about wishing he knew what you would think about him selling a lot of shares which only bring in three per cent., and I told him I was sure you would help him."

My father was really phenomenally kind, I thought, for he positively beamed at the idea of being able to do a good turn to an absolute stranger, and even Mrs. Sherwood looked so sweet over it that I was ready to forgive her former peevishness.

* * * * *

Alan Melrose quite won Lady Windelmore's heart by his buoyant spirits, his devotion to his sisters, and his unaffected courtesy. He wasn't exactly handsome, but he was much more manly than an insipidly perfect specimen of masculine beauty would have been, and, besides being good to look at, he was such a capital talker that when he sat down to lunch with us, he soon had us all laughing at one of his witty sallies.

I had never seen my father in such a good humour, but I could not help noticing that he seemed curiously anxious to please this stripling, whose fortune of £200,000 was quite a small one compared with his own.

I also observed, with a little inward mortification, that he was not content to offer his guest the best of what there was on the table, but that he indulged in the very parvenu-like habit of mentioning the most expensive viands in a most ostentatious way.

"You'll take one of these pigeons, won't you?" he urged presently, with a benevolent smile. "I can recommend them as better than any others you could get in London. My chef prides himself upon pigeons *à la* Moselle."

The remark brought a certain conversation back to my memory, and I inquired:

"Are they some of Kaspar's pigeons?".

Considering what an absolutely unimportant question I was asking, its effect was nothing less than marvellous. Mrs. Sherwood had a sudden fit of coughing, which compelled her to cover her face with her handkerchief. But I was sure that she brought on the coughing for no other reason than to hide the flaming colour which betrayed most unaccountable agitation.

My father, on the other hand, turned lividly pale. His knife dropped from his nerveless fingers, and he glared at me as though he thought I had levelled either a threat or an insult at him. He also did something else. He banished for the time being all the love and gratitude which had been accumulating ever since he spoke so kindly to me in Rotterdam, and it seemed to me that I caught a momentary glimpse of the man as he really was.

But it was only momentary, for, by what appeared to be an almost superhuman effort, he regained his composure, and, heaving a sigh of relief, said faintly: "There! Thank goodness, it has left me again. But I got a fright when my old heart pain came back so suddenly. I had hoped I was rid of it for ever."

Of course we all expressed regret to hear that my father apparently suffered from a dangerous malady. But, though it may sound unfilial to say so, I believed no more in his sudden attack of heart pain than I did in Mrs. Sherwood's attack of coughing, and I was exceedingly puzzled at the disturbance I had caused by merely mentioning Kaspar Krause's pigeons.

* * * * *

Our reception passed off with great *éclat*, and, much to my secret surprise, my personal success was phenomenal. I have learnt to put its true value upon the share of beauty with which Nature has blessed me, and I know now that the splendour of my surroundings and the well-advertised announcement that I was one of the richest heiresses of the day, had much to do with the fulsome attentions of many of my admirers.

But none of the latter could be accused of being mere fortune-hunters, for, in conformity with my father's strict injunctions, not a man was invited to our house who had not either present or prospective riches.

Yet, amid all the glitter and gaiety, I felt a certain amount of uneasiness which I found it difficult to conceal.

Why did not Viscount Broomville put in an appearance? He was invited. And he accepted the invitation with a great show of pleasure. Yet he neither came, nor sent an apology. Could it be because he thought the service I had rendered him the other evening was not sufficient to exonerate me from the charge of having behaved like a girl of no social training at all?

Of course I knew that I shouldn't have gone out late at night by myself. But I could not see why Viscount Broomville should take such a high and mighty view of the case, so I frankly told myself that his lordship was both priggish and ungrateful, and I tried, but without success, to forget all about him.

Mrs. Sherwood was not inclined to be confidential with me. But Lady Windelmore was very communicative, and when we were talking over all that had happened at the reception, it

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seemed perfectly natural to ask her if she had heard anything about him.

"I read in this morning's *Post* that he had suddenly gone abroad," she answered. "But no matter what his hurry was, he ought to have found time to apologise for not coming, and I am so cross with him that I shall tell him so when next I see him."

"Well, never mind him. We have a lot of people coming in this afternoon, and one more or less does not matter."

I said this with a great assumption of carelessness. But I kept returning, in my thoughts, again and again to Viscount Broomville. For, after all, I could not reconcile my personal impressions of him with his apparently cavalierish behaviour, until it suddenly occurred to me that the pursuit by "the bird of evil omen," as I always mentally called the big Dutchman, might have had something to do with the matter.

It was somewhat disappointing to think that he would run away rather than take steps to catch his enemy while he could. But as "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day," it might be mere worldly wisdom that was at the bottom of it all.

There were other people to amuse me, too, notably Alan Melrose, whose ingenuous admiration was very flattering, and to whom my father seemed to have taken a great liking.

The latter, with his usual kindness, gave the youngster all the advantage of his own ripe business experience, and I incidentally overheard them discussing the wonderful prospects which awaited the New Barbary Land Development Co.

"I'm afraid it's too late to get you in," said my father; "I've given the tip to several old friends, and they will resent it if I allow them to be forestalled by a young fellow of no commercial experience whatever."

"Now, look here, Mr. D'Alton," was Alan Melrose's coaxing rejoinder, "you can't go back on your word with me. Only last night you said you thought you could squeeze me in, and there is nothing to stop me from investing this minute, if there's half a chance."

"But the share list closes to-day."

"Why, it has never been advertised!"

"Of course not. We don't believe in over-capitalising, to begin with, and we have had to keep the whole thing as dark as the grave, or there would have been a positive bombardment for shares. As it is, we have kept the business in the hands of a few, and those few will make their money ten times over, if they choose to sell out within a month from now."

I am not sure that my father or his companion had noticed that, after fetching a book, I had quietly sunk into the depths of a luxurious lounge chair. But their talking prevented me from paying much attention to my book, and as it did not seem to matter whether I heard the conversation or not, I did not trouble to interrupt it.

When Mr. Melrose spoke again, his voice betrayed keen disappointment.

"It will be really hard lines if I am floored over this," he said; "for after what you told me the other day, I rushed round and realised everything I had, with the result that I have sought you this afternoon, prepared to invest eighty thousand pounds in the Development Co."

"What a rash youth! Suppose things go wrong?"

"They won't. Everybody says you are the greatest financial genius alive, and that anything you back is bound to succeed."

"Ah, well, I suppose wilful youth must have its way! But don't forget that I have done my best to dissuade you from speculating."

"And you will really help me in this?"

"I can only do it in one way. I had intended reserving a certain number of shares for myself. But, as you are so anxious to join us, I will let you have my reserve stock and——" He stopped suddenly.

"Please, miss, this lady is very anxious to see you."

With these words Susan handed a card to me, and, even as it still lay on the silver salver, I caught the name "D'Alton" on it.

The visit was a bit ill-timed, as it prevented me from hearing the issue of the interesting conversation between my father and young Mr. Melrose.

In fact, they became suddenly silent, but not before the former had uttered a sharp exclamation of annoyance.

Still, I was interested to know that somebody of the same name as ourselves had called to see me, and immediately fell to wishing that she might prove to be a relation, for it seemed

I caught a glimpse of my father's face. It wore the same horror-stricken look as it had a few days before.

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to me that in spite of our wealth, my father and I were a curiously isolated couple.

"Miss Helena D'Alton," I said aloud. "Yes, Susan, ask the lady to come up here. Father," I continued, as Susan went off to do my bidding, "do you know this Miss Helena D'Alton?"

I had risen from my chair and looked round the alcove behind which I had been sitting. But my father had evidently not been pleased at being disturbed, for he was already taking Mr. Melrose out of the room by way of a door which led towards his own private suite. Just as he turned to close the door behind him, I caught a glimpse of his face, and was concerned to see that it wore the same ghastly look which came to it when he had the heart attack a few days ago.

He was evidently in a rather alarming state of health, and I was feeling considerable anxiety on his account when Miss D'Alton was shown into the drawing-room, which, by-the-bye, was much less frequented by either my chaperons or myself than the smaller room which we called the morning-room.

Miss D'Alton proved to be a sweet, white-haired old lady of dignified carriage and handsome presence, who looked at me with fast gathering tears in her eyes.

"Her mother over again," she whispered, as if to herself, and a sudden rush of tears came to my own eyes as I noticed the yearning look of affection she bent on me.

"Pray sit down, Miss D'Alton, and tell me why you have come," I said impulsively. "Did you know my mother?"

"My dear child, I was her godmother. We D'Altons and the Collingwoods were neighbours, and nothing delighted the two families so much as to notice the dawning affection between my nephew, Beverley D'Alton, and my godchild, Helena Vivienne Collingwood. Well, they married, and lived happily together until your mother fell ill, while you were just a baby. Beverley took her abroad, to see if the change would restore her to health, but without avail. Since her death he has never communicated with any of us, and my letters to him have always failed to reach him. The only letter from any of us which did not come back was one in which my housekeeper, who is also my friend, wrote to say that I was dying, and that as I was the last of the old family, she hoped my nephew would come to the funeral. He neither answered the letter nor came to the funeral, and we were both so upset that we never wrote to tell him that I made a miraculous recovery."

"Perhaps," I said somewhat shamefacedly, I must admit, for this narrative did not put my father in a very good light. "Perhaps your letters never really reached my father, for he was always travelling about."

"He got the letters right enough, or rather, he might have done if he had not sent them back, for they were all sent through the solicitor who did his business affairs for him until he realised his English property, and transferred his patronage to somebody else. However, that is neither here nor there. When I heard that he had come to live in London, I made up my mind to call and see you, and here I am."

I was enchanted with the dear lady, and insisted that she should dine with us.

"I am sure that both father and Aunt Flora will be delighted to see you," I added.

"Flora? Who is Aunt Flora?" was the puzzled rejoinder.

"Why, Mrs. Sherwood, my mother's old schoolfriend."

"Humph! That's funny. I never remember hearing of her. Still, I should like to see the lady, and I hope Beverley will feel as kindly towards me as I do towards him."

But, much to her disappointment and my vexation, the coveted meeting did not take place that day, for it transpired that my father had had a sudden business engagement which would keep him from home till after midnight, and that Mrs. Sherwood had such a frightful headache that she could see nobody.

My new-found relation left me at seven o'clock, saying that she would dine with us another day, and when I gave her an affectionate kiss, I little guessed all that was going to happen before I saw her again.

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

Coming! Coming! Coming!

In a few weeks' time there will be announced in this paper a competition which will be of boundless interest to every individual reader of *Short Stories*. It will appeal to all and sundry. It is of quite a unique description, and its novelty will be one of the chief reasons for the tremendous success I am confident it will prove to be. Very likely you are all making wild guesses as to its nature, but I should be greatly mistaken if any of you hit the idea on the nail. Tell your friends about it; tell them to keep their eyes fixed on the succeeding numbers of this paper, for it will be to their advantage to do so. An opportunity lost is seldom regained, and I have in store for you an opportunity which none of you can afford to lose.

Result of the "Statue" Competition.

The Prize of £2 has been awarded to the competitor who sent in what the Editor considered to be the neatest and most nearly correct solution, and is therefore sent to:—Miss Florence Moore, 111 Bordesley Green Road, Birmingham.

The five splendid hand Cameras, with complete photogr phic outfit, have been awarded as follows:—Mrs. Emmeline Bright, Bryn Hafren, Newtown, Montgomery; Mrs. May Darling, 13 Hancock Street, Rusholme, Manchester; Miss Hogg, 15 Mid Street, Fraserburgh, N.B.; Miss M. A. Tyler, 77 John Clay Street, South Shields; John Stackey, Summerdale Villa, 24 St. James' Park, Tunbridge Wells.

The competition was a by no means easy one to judge, as all competitors seemed to have taken very great trouble in arranging the various pieces. I must congratulate the winners, and especially Miss Moore, on the exceptionally painstaking way in which they put together their picture of the waltzers.

About Our Valentine Number.

The week after next will appear our grand Valentine Number. This will be, without exception, the finest penny number of *Short Stories* ever issued.

Do you want to send your lover a valentine? If so, the best one you can send him or her, the one that is most likely to be appreciated, is a copy of our Valentine Number! Everything in it will be appropriate to the season. Don't forget that it will take the place of the ordinary issue dated February 13th. I should advise you to place your order for it in the hands of your newsagent at once. Give him special injunctions to retain for you as many as you require.

The Eighth Unsolved Love Problem.

Next week I shall publish the eighth Unsolved Love Problem. A guinea will be offered to the reader who, under the conditions to be published, sends in what I consider to be the best solution to the query put forth.

I shall announce as soon as I can the name of the winner of the seventh problem.

Your Editor.

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The Romance of a Thirty-Guinea Watch.

LIONEL STAFFORD sat before an easel in his modest little studio and regarded the face on the canvas before him. Brushes and palette were in his hand; and the paint upon his fingers told of a long day's work.

His inspection appeared to afford him some satisfaction, for his eyes rested lingeringly on the fair, girlish face that shone from the canvas. But the expression on his face was not wholly due to artistic triumph. There was a queer light in his eyes that told another and a different story. Months past he had fallen hopelessly in love with the daughter of a great London financier.

It had all happened while he was engaged in painting her father's portrait. A friend of his had recommended him—a comparatively unknown artist—to the financier, and he had obtained the commission. It was there he had met beautiful Ida Crossley, and from that hour his heart had gone out of his keeping.

Strangely enough, the girl seemed to be attracted towards him also, and they found many little opportunities for closer intimacy while the obscure young artist waited the leisure and convenience of the prosperous city magnate.

Thus it came about, as it so often does, that love—unsuspected by all else—crept into the house and took his throne in a girl's heart after having secured the same lofty position in that of a man—and that man our friend, the artist.

And now he was painting from memory the portrait of his beautiful love, Ida Crossley. It was a gloriously lovely face, full of sweetness and tenderness, from which two deep violet eyes shone out like pansies through the summer mist. It was small wonder that he loved her, or that, loving her, he found pleasure in painting so lovely a face.

But he was dreadfully poor. That was the drop of wormwood in the love-cup that embittered the whole draught. To approach the great financier as a prospective son-in-law would have been madness. True, he was a rising man, but the process was a slow one—a painfully slow one—and he chafed against the bonds that held him, as most of us are prone to do at one time or another.

Ida was more philosophical. That was all right, she said with confidence; he was making a name for himself, and—well, she could wait.

She seemed very calm about it all—too calm, Lionel sometimes thought—and went on with her life in precisely the same way as before, showing no sign, pretending to be exceedingly happy and satisfied with her surroundings. There were even times when a vague, unworthy suspicion entered Lionel's head that she was almost callous. He had yet to learn that beneath the mask of indifference many a woman may hide a heart that longs and yearns for what it has not—that the eyes that look so calm and clear often shine the brightest when tears lie trembling just beneath the lids.

* * * * * *

A year had gone by, and Lionel Stafford was slowly but surely gaining ground in his profession. But he still had a pretty severe time of it, for there were many others in the field who, like himself, had set their faces famewards, and thus became his competitors.

For some time he had been putting an odd sovereign or two by whenever he could spare them from his still modest earnings. To-morrow was Ida's birthday, and it was for her he had thus scraped together this little heap of gold. To-day he went to his little hoard, and counted the shining pieces one by one. Thirty-one! That would buy her a present suitable to her position.

He could ill afford so large a sum; but love often overleaps discretion, and who among us can throw the first stone of reproof at such an offender? Just thirty-one. Then it only needed an extra half sovereign to make up the thirty guineas he had to pay for the present he had ordered.

Putting the money carefully in his breast pocket, he went out of his studio and turned into the Strand. A short walk brought him to his destination. Yes, the work had been done, and Lionel Stafford yielded up his precious thirty guineas to a prosperous firm of jewellers for a tiny morocco case containing a little gold watch.

When he got home he unfastened the case, and looked at the pretty trinket within. The inspection pleased him for the jeweller had carefully followed his instructions. On the back of the watch three letters shone out in tiny diamonds. The stones, though small, had been set close together, and the three letters formed the name which of all names he loved best—Ida.

The next morning, by some mysterious law of attraction, which we do not feel ourselves called upon to explain, Lionel Stafford and Ida Crossley made an early morning call (quite casually, of course), upon a mutual friend—a Mrs. Lennox, whose husband was an intimate friend of the great financier.

The amiable lady saw well how matters stood with the young people, and, with astonishing disregard to the laws of social equality, winked (if so charming a lady could do so vulgar a thing) at the secret love-making that took place under her roof. Discretion, therefore, is not always the attendant of perception, but again we leave the casting of the first stone to him who is without sin. Anyhow, here they were—all three chatting in the cosy sitting-room of Mrs. Lennox's house.

Presently that lady excused herself for a few moments, and the lovers were left alone. Lionel immediately went over to Ida, who rose from her chair as he approached. Taking her in his arms he kissed her, and wishing her many happy returns, handed her the precious little packet he had brought. Unfastening the case, she gazed at the gift within, and took it in her hand to look at the name—her name—on the back. Her deep violet eyes were swimming in happy tears as she lifted them again to his face.

"Oh, Lionel!" she exclaimed. "How good of you, dear! But you must have denied yourself many things to get this for me."

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The young man laughed gaily as he again kissed her sweet face.

"Not I," he said lightly. "You don't know how I'm getting on. I shall be an R.A. in three years' time. Sovereigns are not so precious as they used to be, darling. And I am determined to win fame and fortune before I've done with the world."

Poor Lionel! It was not quite true. Yet what else could he say? What man would have admitted that he *had* denied himself to purchase his gift? And how could Lionel know that these very words of his—born of the thoughtful delicacy that comes of loving—would one day weigh heavily in the balance that was to measure out his first great sorrow? How strange it is that words which give us untold pleasure when they are uttered revive in after years to add to the bitterness and humiliation that an unkind Fate has brought us!

* * * * * *

It was three months later, and Lionel Stafford sat alone in his studio with his head buried in his hands. Things had been going very badly with him of late. The very progress he had made seemed now to have deserted him. He knew he possessed talent, though he was no egotist; but it was, or seemed to be, almost hopeless to gain recognition.

Two years before an artist friend of his had gone to America, where he had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. His letters to Lionel were full of tempting inducements to follow his own example, and Lionel had almost begun to think that he, too, might find in the new world the success that seemed out of his reach in the old.

And then had come that last cruel blow, that had left him almost without hope in the world. It had just fallen. A brief, tear-stained little note that had cut into his heart like a surgeon's knife. Once more he picked it up from the floor, where it had fallen, and read it through. His face was very white now, and his lips twitched pitifully.

"DEAR LIONEL," he read. "*My dear father has just died suddenly. Just before his end he called me to him, and had a short conversation with me about his business. As you will soon learn, my circumstances are now greatly altered. And I think, all things considered, my only course is to release you from your engagement. It pains me greatly to do this, but I have no other alternative. Good-bye. Your old-time* "IDA."

That was all. Altered circumstances! Yes, he supposed they were altered. She was the heiress of the wealthy financier—a prize which nobler suitors than he might win. She had had a conversation with her father "about his business." Yes, that was it—"business." He rose from his seat, and, with set face, paced up and down the floor of his studio. Ida—his Ida! He had never dreamt she could be so cruel, so heartless, so mercenary.

Perhaps she had thought him mercenary. A deep flush dyed his pale cheek—a flush that made him pause in his walk. Could that be so? It looked very much like it. Once more he sat down and tried to think collectedly. Should he go and see her? At first he thought he would.

But the wound he had received was aching, and he shrank from a scene which, in all probability, would but deepen it. No, he would go away—to America—hugging all that was left of his idol to his heart, and set himself to work with grim determination. Yes, he would go the very next day.

He took up a pen to write a reply to the girl who had so heartlessly cast him off for the sake of her "altered circumstances." But, after two or three unsatisfactory lines, he tossed down the pen, threw the paper into the fire, and determined to make no sign. He could not even show her how deep had been the stab she had given him.

For, in spite of her desertion of him—in spite of the low value she put to his love for her—he knew deep down in his own heart that he loved her still.

Two days more, and he stood on board the great Atlantic liner *Orpheus*, and turned his back on the land that had given him birth. A new life was before him—a new life and a new world—and he must forget all that had been left behind. Work was before him—hard, persistent, dogged work—and, perhaps, fame!

* * * * * *

It was a bright, sunny day in June, two years later, when a traveller alighted from the Liverpool express at Euston Station, and made his way through the streets of the busy Metropolis.

Two years had made a difference in Lionel Stafford. There was an air of prosperity about him that contrasted favourably with his old days of struggling poverty. But success had not changed him except in appearance. He was just the same impulsive, generous, kindly Lionel as he had been of old.

And his heart? No, that had not changed either. Often had he reproached himself that he had not seen Ida before he left England. She might have loved him all along, and a few words, kindly spoken, might have broken down the resolve she had so hastily formed.

How different the world would seem if we all anticipated these "might have beens," and acted so as to avoid them. But the thought of Ida never occurred to him in any other form than as the wealthy and beautiful heiress of Adam Crossley, the great financier. He had never even inquired into the circumstances attending his sudden death.

He had read little on the voyage out, for he had had little inclination even for that most harmless pastime. And when he had landed in New York, he found little leisure for anything but his work. So she was always the rich heiress, and he wondered as he walked along the busy streets whether she had married some titled aristocrat or some great city magnate like her father. Conjecture is often wide of the truth, as he was soon to discover.

A sudden idea came to him. Hailing a hansom, he directed to be driven to the house of his old-time friend, Mrs. Lennox. No letters had passed between them during his two years of absence, and he smiled to himself as he anticipated the pleasant greeting which was in store for him. But he miscalculated his reception. Mrs. Lennox was polite to a degree, but all her old warmth of manner seemed suddenly to have frozen up. In vain Lionel Stafford tried to break through the ice. In vain he endeavoured to fathom its cause. And then, when he had despaired, it all came out. They had been silent for some few minutes when the lady suddenly asked:

"Do you know, Mr. Stafford, where Miss Crossley is?"

Lionel started.

"I? No. Why, don't you? I should have thought all London knew where so wealthy an heiress lived."

There was a note of bitterness in his tone, which was quite lost on the astonished Mrs. Lennox.

"Wealthy—heiress!" she gasped. "Whatever are you talking about, Mr. Stafford? Surely you are not ignorant of the unhappy circumstances connected with Adam Crossley's death?"

It was now Lionel's turn to evince astonishment.

"Mrs. Lennox," he said, "believe me, I know literally nothing of the affair. As I presume you know already, Miss Crossley wrote to me immediately after her father's death, voluntarily breaking off our engagement, and giving as her reason for so doing her 'altered circumstances.' Of course, I saw at once what she meant. She had suddenly become a rich heiress. I was a poor, struggling artist. I——"

"Stop! Oh, for pity's sake, stop!" The voice of Mrs. Lennox checked him ere he could proceed. "Oh, what a dreadful mistake! And I—I must tell you the truth. Poor Adam Crossley died a ruined man. No one suspected it, not even his most intimate business acquaintances. Nor was that all, for strange rumours got abroad concerning his sudden and unexpected death. The papers took it up, the medical certificate was called in question, and a post-mortem disclosed the fact that death had been due, not to heart failure, as had been believed, but to a powerful narcotic. Poor Ida was penniless, homeless. These were her 'altered circumstances.' Oh, Mr. Stafford, why did you not go to her?"

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There was a dead silence. At the first word of the sudden revelation, Lionel Stafford had caught his breath. His face was very white, and as they had done that dark night in his old studio, his lips twitched with the effort of self-control. Presently his voice broke the silence.

"Where is she — now?" he asked hoarsely.

But Mrs. Lennox only shook her head. She was crying now—crying at the memory of that sad-faced, desolate girl whom she had seen two years ago.

"I wish I knew," she said. "We offered her a home here with us, but she would not accept it. She said she meant to earn her living as thousands of other girls had to do. Still we tried to persuade her, until one day she disappeared altogether. Mr. Lennox has sought everywhere for her, but without success. I tremble to think what has become of her. She was so unfit to fight with the world. Yet she was too proud to do anything else."

Ten minutes later a remorseful and almost despairing man staggered from the house, out into the big, pitiless city, to seek the girl he loved and whom he had in his ignorance deserted.

* * * * *

Of the thirty days which Lionel Stafford had allotted as the duration of his stay in England, five-and-twenty had slipped by without the discovery of the smallest clue to the whereabouts of Ida Crossley. She seemed to have disappeared from the very face of the earth. Yet she was close at hand all the time. So great is the mysterious gulf that separates rich and poor.

Almost in despair, Lionel trudged through street after street, made endless inquiries of likely people who stared at him curiously, but could offer no help. And then, one day, he stumbled upon something that set his pulses beating madly, though his heart grew sick within him.

He had listlessly picked up a copy of *The Exchange and Mart*, and was idly looking down the closely-packed columns of advertisements. Suddenly he stopped. One brief paragraph had caught his eye.

"To be sold. Lady's gold watch. Name of 'Ida' in diamonds on back. Must sell. Will take £5. Urgent. Address No. 23,907."

The words swam before his eyes as he read them again. "Must sell. Will take £5. Urgent." Could anything be more pitiful than that? In a fever of excitement, he wrote a brief note to the owner of the watch, adopting another name, and directed it to No. 23,907.

How he got through the remainder of that day, and more than half that which followed it, he never knew. Hour after hour he hung about the offices of the great advertising medium, worrying the officials with his persistent inquiries and hoping to see her come herself for the letters.

But she never did. The letters were removed by a messenger, and, returning the following afternoon to his hotel, he found a reply awaiting him. With a great choking sensation in his throat, he wrenched open the envelope and ran his eye down the letter within.

"*Yours truly.*—IDA CROSSLEY."

Ah, it was she then! He looked at the address. "97 Harley Street, Bow, E." In an instant he was out of the hotel and in a hansom. Rattling along, quivering with pent-up excitement, remorse, hope, longing—and then—and then—he was face to face with a sad-faced, violet-eyed girl, whom he only dimly recognised as the happy, light-hearted maiden of long ago.

"Lionel! Oh!"

But she was in his arms. Her head was on his breast. Once more the glorious violet eyes shone like soft pansies through a summer mist.

"Ida," he breathed penitently, "can you forgive, darling? I thought you were rich—that it was your riches that had come between us—and I went off to America two days after your letter reached me. And—and all the while you were poor! Oh, is there—is there forgiveness for me?"

Ida Crossley drew his face shyly down to the level of her own and kissed him lovingly.

"Poor old boy!" she murmured. "We have both of us suffered much—you in your loneliness—I in my two years' fight as a music-teacher in this dreary, unappreciative, unlovely old parish of Bow. There is nothing to forgive. I, too, was wrong to let my foolish pride dictate so cold a letter to you. Let us try and make amends for all that has gone by."

Again he kissed the face so close to his own.

"Will you come to America with me?" he pleaded.

"If you wish it—yes."

"I am making a name out there, darling."

"I knew you would do so one day, Lionel, wherever you were."

"I sail in four days, sweetheart."

"Oh!"

"And a special license is obtainable in three," he added.

There was a pause. There was a blush on Ida's cheek when she lifted her eyes to his.

"I suppose you must have your way?" she said.

So, in three days' time, it was, for both of them, once more a case of "altered circumstances."

M. J. W.

Taking her into his arms he kissed her passionately.

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Imperious Miss Chalmers.

Telling How a Girl Chose Between Love and Social Position.

MARGARET CHALMERS was a tall, well-built, handsome girl, just twenty years old, but by her conversation and manners she seemed to be ten years older.

Her regal pose and figure were the envy of most of her girl friends, and the desire of many of her male friends.

Muriel, her sister, was the greatest contrast possible. Of slight build and demure manner, she seemed always in the shade when Margaret chose to shine. Sweet is the adjective I think I should apply to Muriel.

However, you would have to go a long way before you would find a girl possessed of such beauty, or of such a queenly figure, as 'was Margaret Chalmers. So thought Harvey Jefferson, who was passionately attached to Margaret.

Now there was a very warm corner in Margaret's heart for Harvey, but she was not going to let that warm corner get any warmer if it were possible to prevent it. Her reason being that Harvey was only an underpaid clerk in a Government office, which position, Margaret concluded, was not nearly good enough for her.

Harvey Jefferson was a great friend of the Chalmers family, although they one and all knew his would-be secret. In her heart of hearts Muriel sympathised deeply with Harvey, for she knew her sister as he could not with his eyes blinded by love.

And now I am going to tell you another secret, but this is a real secret, although it is a sad one. Muriel loved Harvey. Nobody knew it but Muriel, and she pretended that she did not, but she did; she knew it only too well, as her aching heart would often tell her.

How deeply it pained her nobody knew, to see Harvey gazing at Margaret with an expression which she, Muriel, would have given so much to be able to inspire. Her heart was full to overflowing with repressed feeling, and all the time she smiled gaily.

Harvey had always treated her like a sister, and had confided in her his love for Margaret, little thinking that every word was a stab. And now he had come to her to say that that very evening he was going to ask Margaret to marry him.

Then he had come from the drawing-room where he had been alone with Margaret, with a look of abject agony in his eyes. How she had longed to take him in her arms and comfort him. How dearly she would have loved to have been able to have smoothed out those lines of pain from his troubled face. And all the time Margaret's voice could be heard rising high in song, apparently he was forgotten already.

And this was what took place in the drawing-room.

As Harvey entered Margaret knew what was coming, and forced that warm corner far from her. Wealth and position must be hers, whatever the cost may be. She must enjoy life, surely 'twas for that she had been created. She did not understand the perfect happiness and enjoyment that true love would bring, no matter what the position might be.

"Margaret," said Harvey, "I have come to tell you I love you. I want you to be my wife, dear."

He blurted out the words as quickly as possible, and then stood still, waiting for the answer to issue from those full, rich lips.

"Oh, Harvey, now you have spoilt everything. Whatever did you want to say this for? I like you, in fact, I am fond of you; but I could not marry you."

"Could not marry me?" Harvey repeated the words in a dumfounded kind of manner.

"No, I could not," she cried petulantly. "Why should I, you have nothing to induce me to?"

"But I love you," he said simply.

"Pshaw!" she ejaculated, and then speaking very rapidly she cried: "You say you love me, Harvey, and I think you do. But what I mean is that you surely do not imagine that we can be married and live in an exceedingly quiet manner such as your position would enable you to?"

A pained expression crossed his face, but he said nothing. He stood as one in a dream.

"Go away, and do something great," she cried. "Make a position, get to the top of the tree, then come to me again."

Very sound advice, no doubt, but was the inducement offered sufficient alone?

Harvey stood watching her, unable to speak. He could not understand. He offered her love, she asked for position.

"Well, then," he said eventually, speaking very slowly, as though he thought over each word before he uttered it. "If I can come back to you with a good position you will marry me?"

"Yes, Harvey."

"Then you do love me?" he cried eagerly.

"I like you very much, Harvey," she replied. "And I will marry you when——" She did not finish her speech, but expressively shrugged her shapely shoulders to indicate her meaning.

"Very well, Margaret. I was going to tell you that I have an appointment offered me in the Embassy at Paris, which may prove a stepping stone to a great position. I will endeavour to make one. I shall leave London very shortly, and I will say good-bye now."

He watched her intently as he spoke, and paused, seemingly waiting for some response. But none came, and he continued: "I would rather not see you again before I go. You understand, Margaret, don't you?"

"Oh, quite," she cried, relieved to find that he was taking things so calmly. Naturally she was unaware of the tumult of feelings that existed beneath his placid exterior.

He stepped towards her, as though he would have taken her in his arms, but she held him away.

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"No," she cried. "Not till you come again."

Then he went out, leaving her alone, and she devoted her attention to a new song.

"Oh, Muriel," he groaned, for they met outside in the hall. "She seems heartless. I believe she cares for me, but she cares more for position than love."

"Poor old boy," cried Muriel, sympathetically. "What shall you do now, Harvey?"

He briefly outlined his plans.

"Going away?" she cried, with wide open eyes.

"Yes," he muttered mechanically.

"To make a position for Margaret?"

"Yes," he repeated, gazing somewhat curiously at Muriel, who was still regarding him with those sorrowful blue eyes.

"Oh, I hope you will be happy, Harvey, I hope you will be happy." And then she fled from him up the stairs.

He gazed after her retreating form somewhat surprisedly before going in to make his adieux to the Chalmers family.

He said nothing of his interview with Margaret to either Mr. or Mrs. Chalmers, but simply told them that he would be leaving England for Paris very shortly.

One and all wished him the best of luck. He did not see Muriel again, but sent her a short note of farewell, which she tenderly placed, bedewed with her tears, with a few other relics of Harvey which she had accumulated; and they were sacred to her.

"Oh, she's not worth it, she's not worth it!" Muriel wailed again and again, as she lay face down on her bed, drenching the delicate coverlet with her tears.

She took his photo and passionately kissed it ere she locked it away with the other things.

"Why should he care for you," she said to her reflection in the mirror, "when he sees Margaret every day of his life? Oh, why was I not beautiful that he might have loved me?

"No one shall ever know," she cried. And somehow she seemed comforted with the pain of her sorrowful secret.

Time went by; the Chalmers family heard from Harvey occasionally. Margaret had more letters from him than anyone else. How carelessly she took them and read them, much as she would have taken up a newspaper, and how Muriel grudged those written words.

But with Margaret the coolness was only at first. After Harvey had been away some months that warm corner seemed to spread all over her heart, and she longed for him. But she repressed these feelings, and would not admit of them even to herself.

It is possible to be hypocritical with one's own self, and this was the state of affairs with Margaret Chalmers.

She became more than ever the belle of her particular set, and indeed wherever she visited. She was more than ever admired and envied, but the admiration and envy seemed to have lost its pleasure; to be envied was a pleasure to her before she knew the real state of her feelings towards Harvey.

In his last letter he had said that he was getting on, but very slowly. Promotion was very difficult to obtain, but still he did not despair; he would make it come to him.

And now as to Harvey Jefferson. He had gone away with his heart seemingly torn in shreds. He felt that life without Margaret was not worth living.

In Paris he threw himself heart and soul into his work, and speedily earned the commendation of his chief. Thus a very favourable report of him was forwarded to headquarters, although he knew it not. His chief was well aware of Harvey's desire to return to England if possible, and was even then using his influence to obtain an appointment for Harvey.

Occasionally a letter would come from Margaret, but most of his knowledge of her since his departure was gleaned from letters from Muriel, who was proving herself a most indefatigable correspondent.

Thus he found himself looking very eagerly for Muriel's letters, and she kept him very well informed, although it cost her considerable pain in doing so.

But one day a letter came from her which caused his face to blanch, and the veins to stand out on his forehead. But let us hurry back to England, in order that we may better understand.

About six months after Harvey had gone away, a family by the name of Devereux had taken a large house near to that of the Chalmers, and the families speedily became intimate.

There were two daughters and one son in the family, but it is with the latter that we are more concerned. His name was Reginald, and he was possessed of considerable wealth besides being the heir to his father's large estates and riches. Also, Reginald Devereux was a good fellow, and the possessor of equally good looks.

Almost as soon as he met Margaret Chalmers he fell deeply in love with her, but he managed to keep this knowledge to himself, until one evening at Margaret's home the two were left together, and then he told her of his love.

Even Margaret was somewhat taken by surprise, so well had he kept his secret. She thought for a few moments, whilst he waited anxiously. She quickly reviewed the position and prospect, and then put her hands in his, and said that she would marry him.

And that was what Muriel's letter to Harvey had said. And that was why he spent the evening in the Champs Elysées without one thought of dining. He wanted to think.

Why was he not more upset at the news? He reproached himself when he discovered that he was not stricken down with the sudden blow. Could it be that he did not care so much for Margaret as he had thought, and her absence had brought this truth home to him? Was that the reason?

It never occurred to him that his idol had been shattered that evening in the drawing-room when Margaret had preferred position to love.

Her letters, which had been carefully worded, had unconsciously enhanced the dormant feelings. And now she had not even written to tell him of this decision.

Pshaw! What did it matter? This Devereux had wealth and position, and that was what she wanted, so why need he worry?

That very same day his chief acquainted him with the fact that he had been appointed to a Secretaryship in the Foreign Office in London, the result of his good services in Paris. And that estimable gentleman went away wondering why the dickens young Jefferson did not seem so gratified as he expected.

Harvey was not to leave Paris for a month to come, he was informed. In the meantime he would still be attached to the embassy.

Why, he asked himself, why did he immediately sit down and write to Muriel, telling her of the good news?

If you had asked him, he would probably have replied that he always told Muriel everything.

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But then, again, why was he so impatient to get her reply? This I do not think he could have answered so readily.

Her letter came, a long, warm letter, with tender sympathy and congratulation both expressed in her own sweet, womanly way.

"Dear old Muriel," he muttered.

The month rapidly passed by, and Harvey was back again in London. Before proceeding to his old home, he had reported himself at the Foreign Office.

He found his new chief to be a most affable man, who gave him all the information that he was seeking. Lord Harbury, who had obtained the appointment for him, had not been able to tell him much concerning it, beyond the fact that it would be a very good thing for him.

He was now gratified to find that he would commence with a very handsome salary, and that his prospects were of the brightest.

Then he hurried down to his home, or, at least, where his home had been in days gone by.

He came quite unexpectedly, for no one knew of his return. He called on the Chalmers and found that only Mrs. Chalmers was at home. She cordially welcomed him, for she had taken the place of his dead mother as near as it is possible for another woman to do.

He acquainted her with his good news, and she was as pleased as if he had been her own boy.

"Were you surprised to hear of Margaret's engagement?" she asked, for the understanding between Margaret and Harvey had been kept a secret, and only Margaret, Harvey, and Muriel shared it.

"I was rather," said Harvey, but ere he could say another word, the door opened and Margaret herself swept in.

Immediately Harvey commenced to tremble, and a dark flush spread over his face. But Margaret was not in the least nervous, although a strange feeling of joy crept over her.

They shook hands in the commonplace manner, and gradually Harvey regained his composure and chatted affably with Margaret.

In a few moments she saw the difference in him, and strove to reassert her influence over him with many winning ways, but to no purpose.

Then she endeavoured to make him jealous. She spoke of her future husband, showed Harvey his photo, but in all Harvey seemed only glad that she was apparently happy.

"If only he were in a better position," she murmured to herself as she gazed at Harvey.

She felt in her heart of hearts that the nearest approach she had to love was all for Harvey. But he was poor, or, at least, he was not opulent. Neither could he put her in the position that Reginald Devereux could.

Harvey had said nothing to her of his promotion and bright prospects, knowing that Mrs. Chalmers could tell her, if she were desirous of hearing.

Muriel, he learnt to his disappointment, was not expected back until after tea, she having gone to a bazaar.

"She will be delighted to see you," said Mrs. Chalmers.

After tea Harvey went out, saying that he would call back again later on in the evening. He went straight to the building where the bazaar was being held, to wait until Muriel should come out. One by one, in couples and groups, people issued from the hall, and then, at last, came Muriel.

That same little figure, with its sweet, winning face. He watched her standing in the light of the lamps in the doorway. What was this strange feeling that came over him as he gazed at her? Why was he so intensely glad to see her? And why did he press so eagerly forward as she came out into the dark, tree-lined road?

"Muriel," he said.

She gave a little start of surprise, and then she looked up into his face, and immediately her eyes lit up with pleasure.

"Harvey!" she cried. "Oh, it is good to see you again."

She stood holding his hand and devouring his face with her eyes. Then she suddenly blushed at her eagerness, and released his hand.

"Shall we go on home?" she said in rather shy tones. "You are coming to see us, are you not?"

"I have been already," he replied. "And then I came along to meet you, Muriel."

"To meet me?" she cried quickly.

"Yes, Muriel, because I felt I wanted you. Oh, my dear, I loved you all the while and did not know it! What I mistook for love I offered to Margaret. Muriel, dear, dare I hope?"

He quickly read his answer in the lovelit eyes that were turned up to his in shy eagerness; the next moment he was raining kisses upon her.

When Harvey had written from Paris to tell Muriel of his promotion, he had not been able to give any details, and had only said that he had obtained a better appointment in London. Thus, she was quite unaware of the great lift up the ladder that he had been given.

"We shall not be able to make a great show, shall we, Harvey?" she asked softly.

"Why, little woman, I forgot to tell you all about my new appointment." And then he told her of all the good fortune that had come to him.

Now comes the sad part of my story.

That same evening, before Harvey had said anything to either Mr. or Mrs. Chalmers of his desire to become their son-in-law, Margaret had manœuvred matters so as to be alone with him.

"Mother told me of your promotion," she said, standing close to him, and placing her beautiful face near his own.

"Did she?" he muttered lamely.

"Yes, Harvey, may I congratulate you?"

"Why, of course," he replied.

"Don't you remember, Harvey, what we agreed upon before you went away?" She stood so close to him that her heaving breast pressed against him, and her hair was soft against his face.

For one mad moment his arms were raised to clasp her to him, whilst she looked into his eyes with a triumphant fascination, and her breath fanned his cheek. She threw her arms about him, and clung closer to him in wild abandon, whilst she passionately whispered her intreaties in his ears.

He stood half dazed with the awful temptation, almost yielding, and then the vision of Muriel came before his eyes, and he thrust the temptress away from him.

"And this is your trust to Reginald Devereux?" he said scornfully. "And would have been mine, too, I suppose, if I had been in his place."

"No, no, Harvey!" she cried. "It is you I love, and always have loved. Oh, don't leave me, Harvey!"

"You love position more, Margaret, and I have learnt what true love is," was his stern reply.

And then he left her.

In less than two months' time Muriel and Harvey were married, and if there are any who doubt about choosing between love and position, let them just call on either Mr. or Mrs. Harvey Jefferson, or Mrs. Reginald Devereux.

E. Newton Bungey.

To Those About to Marry.

Don't let the knot be tied without knowing something about the character and disposition of each other. This you can find out by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. In return an accurate delineation of your character will be sent. If you both obtain these delineations, and then compare them, you will be able to decide whether a happy marriage is likely to result.

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£500 IN CASH PRIZES

1st Prize, £250.

2nd Prize, £100. 3rd Prize, £50.

AND 100 PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

SPLENDID NEW WINTER EVENING CONTEST.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, numbered from 1 to 12. What you have to do is to find the longest word entirely composed of the letters in each set, *not necessarily using all the letters.* In each case, you must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest word you can make. The word containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If two or more such words of the same length can be made from a set of letters it is only necessary to put down one of these words. Only one word may be written on each line.

When you have filled in your solutions, get a copy of next Friday's PEARSON'S WEEKLY, in which you will find the full conditions and another Coupon.

The first prize of £250 will be given to the competitor from whom the Editor of PEARSON'S WEEKLY receives the best list under the published conditions. The second prize of £100 will go to the person from whom the Editor of PEARSON'S WEEKLY receives the next best list, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

Every member of a household may compete, but no competitor may send in more than one complete set of pages.

Example:
ECGJLUZ: JUGGLE (The Z is here an unnecessary letter and is ignored.)

FIRST LIST.

1. AELP .....
2. GIKN .....
3. EHOPK .....
4. ACFNY .....
5. AABDLORR .....
6. ADEHRT .....
7. ORRWY .....
8. DEINPS .....
9. FGHIT .....
10. EILNNT .....
11. EILLMR .....
12. EGLN .....

Name .....

Add'ress .....

.....

The full conditions, together with the second list appear in PEARSON'S WEEKLY, published on Friday next, Jan. 29.

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Stuff and Nonsense.

SAID he, "Matilda, you are my dearest duck." Said she, "Augustus, you are trying to stuff me." She was too sage for him.

The Best of Many.

HE: "And what do you think of the engagement ring I sent you?" She: "Oh! it's splendid. I have never had such a fine one before."

Time Changes Things.

TED: "Tom is engaged to the prettiest girl in town. He takes all his friends round to see her." Ned: "That's only natural. As soon as they are married he won't let one of them come near the house."

A Cautious Lover.

ETHEL: "I know he is a financier, but he is not a speculator." Maude: "How do you know, dear?" Ethel: "He didn't buy our engagement ring until he was quite sure that I would accept him."

They Fell to Arms.

MISS BUTEE: "Newspaper work takes in almost everything, doesn't it?" Spacer (moving up closer to her): "Well, yes, our profession does embrace a great deal." Then the light got so nervous it went out.

Used to It.

ELLA: "How long did it take Fred to propose to you?" Stella: "He talked about twenty minutes." Ella: "That's an awfully long time." Stella: "I know it seems so; but, then, you must remember he is a lawyer."

He Hadn't the Courage.

SHE: "Mr. Trotter has been sitting over in that corner all the evening; I wonder why he doesn't come and talk to me." He (Trotter's rival): "I told him that his trousers bagged at the knee, and he dare not walk across the room."

Why She Refused Him.

THE IMPECUNIOUS EARL: "Surely, you cannot think I would marry for your money?" The Heiress: "Certainly not, my lord, but everybody else would think so, and it would break my heart to have you regarded with unjust suspicion."

How Small He Felt!

"Do you think, Miss Fanny," he said, "the time will ever come when women will propose to the men?" She lifted up her beautiful eyes and looked him squarely in the face. "Never, Mr. Smith," she replied, "if they are anything like you."

A Reason for her Request.

WIFE (to husband): "Arthur, love, I want you to give John a good scolding to-morrow morning." Husband: "What for? I am perfectly satisfied with the fellow." Wife: "Well, you know, he has to beat the carpets to-morrow, and he strikes ever so much harder when he's in a bad temper."

Surely.

HE (indignantly): "I hope I know my own mind!" She (sweetly): "Yes! You surely ought to know as much as that!"

Uncomplimentary.

MR. STUCKUP: "Why, it's years since I've seen you, Miss Rood. I haven't altered much, have I?" Miss Rood: "No, I'm sorry to say."

Quite True.

"Do you love me?" said the paper bag to the sugar. "I'm just wrapped up in you," replied the sugar. "You sweet thing!" murmured the paper bag.

No Cause for Alarm.

CHAFFEE: "Miss Goldiclocks asked me what I thought of you last night." Brann: "Is that so?" Chaffee: "Yes. But don't be alarmed, I didn't tell her."

Proof Positive.

MISS SINGER: "I wonder if that rich uncle of mine remembered me when he made his will? I used to sing to him." Mr. Law: "I'm sure he must have. He hasn't left you anything."

A Small Share.

KATE: "And so you are married? Keeping house, I suppose?" Maud: "Not exactly. There is a lady from Ireland who keeps the house, but she allows us to eat and sleep in it."

A Soft Answer Turneth Away Wrath.

POLLY (to her *fiancé*): "Tom, you danced four times with that girl Jenkins and only twice with me." Tom (slyly): "Well, it takes quantity, you know, to make up for quality."

He Wasn't Very Happy.

NEWLYWED: "Why, I never thought of saving until I got married." Bachelor: "And do you now?" Newlywed: "Oh, yes, indeed! I'm continually thinking how much I might save if I wasn't married."

A Likely Reason.

WINKERS: "Why is it that women always dislike a prominent man who is an old bachelor?" Blinkers: "Because they can't say that he would never have amounted to anything if it had not been for his wife."

She'd Trouble Him No More.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: "It is so kind of you, Harry, to take the trouble to drive me home." Son-in-Law: "Don't mention it. It is no trouble at all. On the contrary, it is the most delightful drive I have had for some time."

Preferred to Have Witnesses.

LIGHTLOVE: "At last, dear Sophia, we are alone, and I can tell you that I lo——" Sophia: "Oh, please, no, Mr. Lightlove—don't tell me here." Lightlove: "Why not? There is no one to see us or overhear us here." Sophia: "That's just it."

He was Exceptionally Original.

MISS CAUSTIQUE: "So you are engaged to that Mr. Atkinson, are you? Now, tell me honestly, what can you see in him that distinguishes him from all other men in the world whom you have ever met?" Miss Passee (with unlooked-for frankness): "He asked me to be his wife."

An Effective Remedy.

"I HOPE," said Mrs. Allkrect to her daughter Jennie, "that you did not allow your cousin John to kiss you on the cheek when you bade him good-bye at the station last night?" "No, indeed, I didn't, mamma." "Well, that's one of his habits, kissing girls on the cheek. How did you manage to prevent him from kissing you on the cheek?" "Easily enough. I held up my mouth for him to kiss."

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MRS. BOBBIN'S BANK ACCOUNT.

The Tale of a Cheque Book.

"I BELIEVE that every woman should understand what pecuniary independence is," said Mr. Bobbin at breakfast on the morning of his wife's birthday, "and I feel sure that you will appreciate the little gift I have for you."

"I know you've bought that little opal and diamond ring I wanted," said Mrs. Bobbin, delightedly. "You dear, extravagant thing!"

Bobbin dived into his coat pocket and brought out two small books, which he gave impressively to his wife. She looked them through as though they were a Chinese puzzle.

"Those, my dear," said Bobbin, "are your two new bank books. I have deposited for you at the Rattlethem Bank the sum of fifty pounds as your birthday gift, and hereafter I shall give you your monthly allowance also in the shape of a cheque, which you can deposit and draw against in due form."

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" said Mrs. Bobbin, trying to conceal her disappointment about the ring. "Do I simply show these at the shops when I want to buy anything?"

"The small book," said Bobbin, "is your deposit book, in which will be recorded any amounts which you may wish to—er—save. You will find that having a bank-book will cause you to save money almost unconsciously. This long book is your cheque book, on which I have had put your monogram in gold."

"And pink leaves, too!" said Mrs. Bobbin. "Just my colour! What do I do with this? Oh, isn't it sweet!"

"They get those things up very nicely at the Rattlethem Bank," said Mr. Bobbin. "I believe they have more ladies among their depositors than men, and they have clerks specially selected for their politeness and their courtesy in explaining matters. These cheque-books are rather a pretty idea. When you want to draw a cheque you tear out one of these and enter the amount on the counterfoil."

"And spoil the book!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin.

"That's what it is made for. See, these perforated lines show where you tear it off. This place is for the number of the cheque, and this for the date. Here is where you sign your name, and on this line you write the amount of money you wish to pay out."

"But I'm not going to tear out one of those pretty cheques!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin. "I'll get money from you whenever I want it, or else I'll have things charged!"

"That is not exactly the idea, my dear," said Bobbin, looking a trifle uneasy. "I want you to learn to take care of your own bank account and your own money. Of course, you'll have to draw cheques."

"But I never, never could draw, Albert, it was always my very worst lesson at the convent—it was——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You don't understand; to draw a cheque is to write it out—to fill it up—see?"

"And I can go anywhere and spend a cheque?"

"Well, if you're known it will be all right, otherwise you'll have to be identified."

"Oh, how perfectly horrid! I am sure I never can do that. Why, Mrs. Sniffington had to go to the police-station to identify her purse. That's where you have to go to be identified, Albert!"

"Nonsense, my dear! It certainly is high time you began to learn something about business affairs. Anyone who knows you can identify you anywhere."

"Suppose I want to pay my fare on the car or pay a cabman. Will he be able to identify me?"

"Oh, you don't use cheques for such small amounts as that. You just ask me about it any time you want to draw a cheque, and I'll let you have the benefit of my advice."

"Well, just let me have twenty pounds this morning," said Mrs. Bobbin, "for I've got to go to town and get some things. I don't want to spoil the book until I have had it awhile, anyhow!"

So Bobbin gave his wife the money and she started for town. Looking out of the bus she saw the Rattlethem Bank, and she decided to go in and see what it was like. It was a beautiful white marble place, with young men clerks at work behind plate-glass partitions. Then there was an inviting little carpeted inclosure, where she saw several women sitting at small desks writing or counting money.

Mrs. Bobbin walked in and said to the young man at the nearest window: "Will you be kind enough to let me have some notepaper and envelopes? I have a few letters to write."

He looked at her strangely. "We have nothing but the official paper, madam," he said, "and it is against our rules to use that even for our own correspondence."

"I think that is very odd," said Mrs. Bobbin, "my husband told me that you were specially courteous to ladies here."

"Are you a depositor?" asked the clerk.

"I beg your pardon. Am I what?" said Mrs. Bobbin haughtily.

"Have you an account here?"

"I am a member here," said Mrs. Bobbin, drawing out her books and confronting him with them triumphantly.

"Oh, a new account!" said the clerk, smiling. "I see. Are you Mrs. Bobbin?"

"I am Mrs. Albert Hollingway Bobbin," said Mrs. Bobbin, drawing herself up. "Do you wish to identify me?"

"Oh, not at all! Not at all!" said the clerk. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Bobbin; would you like to meet our cashier, Mr. Knockem."

"Certainly not, sir," said Mrs. Bobbin grandly. "I should like to—to—draw a cheque!"

"Very well, madam, you will find a table and chair opposite, with writing materials upon it. When you have made out your cheque you can give it to the cashier, fifth window to the right. He will let you have the money."

"What money?"

"The money your cheque calls for."

"But I don't want any money. I simply wish to draw a cheque."

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"Oh, very well! I beg your pardon. Be seated, madam. The small table opposite."

Mrs. Bobbin sat down and took out her new book, toying affectionately with its pink pages. Then she tried one of the pens. In the date line she wrote "Thursday afternoon," in a sprawling, angular hand. Then she signed her name with a flourish.

"Is this correct?" she inquired of the young man at the window. He looked it over with a carefully suppressed smile.

"Er — you've got the things in the wrong place, but if you just write the amount and the name of the person you wish to—"

"Dear me, I shall never understand it!" said Mrs. Bobbin desperately.

"Shall I fill it in for you?" asked the young man politely.

"If you will be so kind," said Mrs. Bobbin.

"To whose order?" asked the clerk.

"Oh, it really doesn't matter," said Mrs. Bobbin.

"To the order of bearer, shall I write?"

"That will do very nicely."

"Now the amount—what shall it be?"

"I don't care," said Mrs. Bobbin. "You see, I have twenty pounds that my husband gave me this morning. If you'll just draw the cheque I'll be so much obliged. I have an engagement with the dressmaker at twelve."

"Then I'll leave the amount blank?"

"Just as you please," said Mrs. Bobbin, graciously. "I'm so much obliged. Good morning!" and she turned to go.

"Here's the cheque," said the clerk, waving it through the window.

"Oh, do I take it with me?" inquired Mrs. Bobbin. "I thought I left it here."

"Not unless you wish to draw some money."

"Oh, thank you so much! Good morning."

That evening Mrs. Bobbin had a lesson in drawing cheques from her husband, when she had shown him the fruit of her morning's interview in the Rattlethem Bank, which document he carefully destroyed. For the first time he made his wife understand that she personally had some money at her disposal in the bank.

Next morning she visited her dressmaker and then proceeded to do some shopping. She explained at the grocer's shop where she was a frequent customer that she wished to pay her bill with a cheque, and the manager filled it in for her and had her affix her signature.

"Now, you'll send these things home just as though they were paid for?" she said to the manager, who had dealt with ladies who had bank accounts before.

"Precisely the same, madam," he said smilingly. The bill was for five pounds, and he knew that Bobbin was good for it. Mrs. Bobbin felt so elated over her success that she went to her milliner's and bought two hats for four guineas, and then found that she had no money for luncheon. She had given the milliner a cheque for the hats, and she told her of her predicament.

"I will cash a cheque for you with pleasure," said the milliner.

"Can you make it out for me just as you did for yourself just now?" asked Mrs. Bobbin.

"Certainly," said the milliner, "how much would you like?"

Madam thought that ten pounds would be sufficient, and when she received the crisp notes she felt effusively grateful.

"I shall pay you this to-morrow!" she exclaimed as she went out of the shop, putting the money in her purse.

A few days later Mrs. Bobbin had a visit from one of the bank clerks. He told her that she had overdrawn her account, but she indignantly denied it, and showed him that her book still existed as a proof of her financial soundness.

"You can see for yourself that it is quite full of cheques!" she said indignantly. "I never heard of such a thing! Certainly I have money in the bank!"

"On the contrary you owe us money, Mrs. Bobbin. You have overdrawn. Can't you understand?"

"I shall certainly tell my husband about this!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin.

"He may be able to explain it to you, and please make the amount of the overdraft good as soon as possible."

When Bobbin came home there was a stormy half hour, tears, and much explaining. As a result of it all, Mrs. Bobbin never renewed her bank account. She says that money is good enough for her, and that when she paid people with cheques it always seemed as though she still owed them the cash.

"Besides that," she said to her husband, "I never had any pocket-money, and as for that birthday present, I never saw it! And I had nothing but trouble all the time. But those pink cheques do make the loveliest curl papers you ever saw!"

Harry Richardson.

A New Magazine Is Coming

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Secret of the Letters.

As the trap drew nearer it gradually slowed down, and at last came to a standstill in front of the financier, who had gazed with fascinated eyes upon the face of the man driving.

It was not what would be termed an ordinary face, but the expression on it was the first thing that arrested the onlooker. It was daring, defiant, and yet curiously humorous, as though in his secret mind the man knew himself to be a hopeless scamp, yet had sufficient grace of humour to be eternally a jest to himself.

In figure he was largely made, cast in a slighter mould than the financier, but more sinewy than the latter, and he was burnt to a deep tan that showed like black against the gleam of two rows of even teeth.

Such was the man whom Caleb J. Johnson, Lady Violet's bridegroom of a day, stared at, as though he were a ghost risen from the dead past.

The stranger sprang lightly from the trap, and glanced carelessly at the door of No. 3 Lillie Road, then, after a moment's quiet cogitation, he removed his glance to the figure of the financier, and for a wild moment Caleb J. Johnson hoped that he was not recognised—that the years had so changed him as to make him appear a man apart from what he had once been when he had worked side by side on the gold claim with the lithe-looking man whose cool eyes pierced his secret, as they ran quickly up and down him, to eventually meet his own in a long, steady glance of recognition.

"So," drawled the stranger slowly, "they talk of truth being stranger than fiction, and by gum, it's true! Of all the spots in the world where I one day hoped to renew our friendship, the village of Leyton is the very last where I expected that most enjoyable re-union to take place, Mr. Jerningham."

"Hush!" replied Caleb J. Johnson, finding his tongue loosened by the mention of the name he had cast aside for ever. "I won't pretend not to know you, Rayne, although the years have changed you less than they have me—but it's no use our quarrelling in a village street over what took place more than twenty years ago."

He held out his hand—that slow smile, which his shareholders pronounced so irresistible, touching the corners of his mouth.

"Come, Rayne, let bygones be bygones! We were young in those days and our blood was unruly, but now we are men of the world!"

The man Rayne laughed sardonically, yet a glance of unwilling admiration shot from his eyes as he gazed at the well-to-do figure of the man he called "Jerningham."

"You can't carney me, Jerningham," he laughed. "I'm not the man to forget; you wronged your friend as you did your wife. We both trusted you in those days, and how did you treat us? You robbed me of my share of the money we made together; and you robbed your wife of her happiness and life.

"Ah!" he exclaimed passionately, "she, that beautiful woman who left everything for you, and refused to be comforted by other people who knew her value—now you talk of

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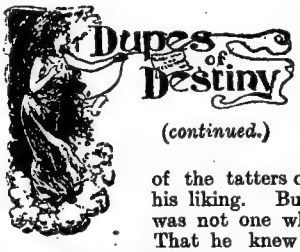

(continued.)

letting bygones be bygones!" He laughed bitterly. "Have you ever troubled to find out how Helen died?" he asked in an altered voice.

The financier coloured slightly. This raking-up of the tatters of a cast-off ghost was not to his liking. But the man in front of him was not one whom he wished to provoke. That he knew him still as "Jerningham" argued well for his dual *rôle* as the Gold King and financier of several companies. He must see that he did not betray himself to Rayne as Caleb J. Johnson. Then the fat would be in the fire.

"Helen died in England—so I learnt," he said quietly. "I have often reproached myself for having failed in my duty as a husband to her. But—well, I was a rough, jealous brute in those days, Rayne—and——" he paused significantly—"you were a handsomer chap than myself."

A dark flush mounted the tanned cheeks of the man who listened to him with such bitterness in his eyes.

"You mean to insinuate," he burst out suddenly. "Why, Good Heavens, man, she was an angel! I reverenced her as one. I even went to the length of tracing her after she left you, or rather after she was *deserted* by you. She did not die in England, but on board a liner among the steerage passengers and she gave her life for your son."

"My son! What do you mean?" Caleb J. Johnson said, paling strangely. "I have no son!"

"Helen—your wife died," repeated the man doggedly, "and left a son. I learnt so much, and then lost all trace of them. Of course, it never occurred to you, Jerningham, to look for a possible son, did it?"

The financier was silent. His thoughts had flown back to the woman whom he had so recently married under the name of "Caleb J. Johnson." Did she learn his secret, he could see the scorn and loathing in her patrician face.

"I knew nothing of this," he said hoarsely; "believe me, or not, as you like, Rayne—it is the truth. I will seek out my son now, unless he is dead."

"Unwanted children always live!" returned the other sullenly. He was beginning to feel the influence of the financier's personality and his anger was melting.

"I will also pay what I—I—borrowed from you," continued Caleb J. Johnson, following up this advantage. "I have made just a little money, enough to live quietly on—and you shall have your bit back. I will see to it when I return to town? What is your address?"

Rayne hesitated. "Write to 'R,' c.o., Post Office, Leyton," he said evasively. "That will find me."

"What are you doing here?" said the financier abruptly.

"I drove over from the country to get something a friend of mine left in his rooms at No. 3 Lillie Road here."

The financier started. That was the address where the curate lived in whom his bride took such an interest. "What did this backwoodsman want with him?" he wondered.

"Ah!" he said carelessly. "I came down here to call on a young chap in this street about—about some work I intended getting for him—but I'm afraid I made a mistake in the address. I must return to town and wire to him."

"Well," said the other hastily, "I won't stop now. I have a lot to do, and will drive in later and do my friend's commission. You are returning now, aren't you?" he went on anxiously, "and that money—the money you *borrowed*"—with a sarcastic grin. "On second thoughts you had better send it to me at my address. It is 'Water Grange'—don't forget.

"I have not much faith in your word, Jerningham, but if I find the money is not returned, I shall trace you to your London home, where there is probably a second 'Mrs. Jerningham.' She would be interested in her husband's treatment of his first wife!"

He drove off smartly, before Caleb J. Johnson could do more than note the address, which he did with a thrill of satisfaction.

The taunt about the second wife he could afford to ignore, since he was glad to find that his identity with the Gold King, Caleb J. Johnson, was not suspected by his old mate, who in the past had worked with him on the claim that had made the fortune he had stolen from his partner afterwards. Once the money was paid back, he would be square with Rayne.

In the meantime he must try to save that poor chap, Philip Nullius, from the fate of which he seemed in danger.

Rayne had carelessly told him his address as "Water Grange." Then he was concerned in the concealment of the curate; it was at his room that Rayne had intended calling for papers, but had decided to wait, fearing that his old enemy should watch him.

He would see that this time he outwitted the man who had sprung such a surprise upon him. It gave Caleb J. Johnson a sense of glee that in a way he would get his own back!

He knocked at the door of No. 3 Lillie Road, and, telling the landlady that he had called for the papers of his young friend, went into the sitting-room that Philip Nullius had lately vacated. He was interested in the curate, since he was Marcella's lover, and a special *protégé* of his bride, and it was with a feeling of curiosity that he opened a small case containing papers, letters, and one or two memoranda.

"I wonder what kind of a chap this Nullius is!" he murmured. "If you want to know a man's character, it is always safe to read his letters."

With that cynical speech, he undid a packet of letters. They were from Marcella—only a few girlish notes, and two letters that breathed a deep tender love.

The financier's eyes softened. He liked Marcella. She was a good sort of girl—well plucked too, to bolt from that slimy baronet as she did. Another bundle of papers attracted him. They were tied up with strong ribbon, and on the outside wrapper were the words, written in a clerical hand:

"These are the only papers relating to the obscure parentage of Philip Nullius, the foundling, born on board the liner from Australia, twenty-five years ago. The name of the mother is unknown, but her only possession at the time of her death was the few letters found sewn in her dress."

"So these interesting documents are supposed to throw light on the poor lad's birth!" Caleb J. Johnson murmured. "I'm afraid he is no one of any importance, poor chap. The heirs to titles are not usually born in the steerage of Australian liners."

He opened the packet with gentle fingers. After all, they had once been cherished by some woman who had thought well of the writer, who in turn had probably cast her off. He was not so sure that the curate was a fit match for the only child of Sir Cyprian Rust.

In one envelope there was a cutting from a paper. He drew it out curiously. It was torn across and one half was missing, but the financier read the words "living child—heir—if a boy. Address Samuel——" Then it broke off suddenly.

With a new interest he drew out one of the letters. It was old and very yellow with age. There was no date, or address, and no beginning except the words: "My darling!" he turned to the signature; he was now intensely interested, and a strange idea seized him that he was looking back, as it were, into his own past. A foolish thought, but it gripped him for all that.

Then, as his eyes fell on the name at the foot of the letter, the room seemed suddenly to whirl round and round the Gold King's head, and his heart began to throb so loudly that he was afraid lest it would suddenly stop altogether.

The name scrawled at the bottom of that poor little love-letter was one he knew well. It had been a nickname of his own. It was "Cabel," the word "Caleb" slightly altered. His first wife had always called him that for fun, and he had stuck to the name in the first days when he had cared for her.

And this letter—what did it mean by being in the possession of a friendless boy! *He* had written it—*he*, the Gold King, to his dead wife. *Whose* hand had dared pass it on to a stranger?

He stared round the room, a new wonder dawning in his eyes.

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A stranger—he had said—a stranger! But the wrapper said "the woman gave birth to the boy"—then—oh, Heaven! the curate—the foundling—were one and the same as his lost son! The neglected sea-waif whose father's behaviour had killed his mother!

He fell into a chair. His limbs were trembling and the moisture stood on his brow in drops.

Suddenly he started up with a cry:

"'Water Grange'! He is there—perhaps hurt! Perhaps——"

Then with a hoarse shout he seized his hat, and tore out of the room.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Philip Finds an Ally.

WHEN Philip Nullius woke the morning following his invitation and acceptance of the same, the evening before, to visit the vicar who lived at "Water Grange," he sat up and gazed round him with puzzled eyes.

He was not in his dingy bedroom at 3 Lillie Road, and he wondered whether he had dreamt the proceedings of the night before. His head ached, and somehow a sensation of heaviness seemed to lie upon him.

As he grew more accustomed to his surroundings he saw that he was in a large, bare-looking room, with little furniture in it, and any there was had an old, worm-eaten appearance.

The bed on which he was lying was strangely built, being a large four-poster, with heavy brocade curtains that smelt of an odour of long ago. The one window, though large, was strongly shuttered, both inside and out, the only light in the room coming from several ventilation holes.

Philip frowned and sprang out of the bed. He was puzzled as to his presence in the strange room, and meant to find out what had happened that he had not left "Water Grange" when he thought he had.

He remembered meeting several men who had all been most agreeable and pleasant, and though he had not liked them particularly, he had had no cause to complain of his welcome not being hearty. In fact, once or twice it had struck him that there was an ironical ring about the congratulations and greetings.

Even the white-headed vicar—the uncle of the man he had distrusted—had not entirely satisfied his idea of what a clergyman of the church should be. There had been a veiled levity throughout in his manner, despite his courtesy.

"This must be a stupid joke," Philip muttered. "I'll very soon get those shutters open, then I shall see what time it is by my watch."

He made several futile efforts to let in the light, but in spite of exerting all his strength, the shutters remained firmly closed.

Thoroughly alarmed by his failure, Philip turned away to seek his coat, where he knew he had put his watch on going to bed.

"This might be a prison," he thought. Then paled a little. It was an odd coincidence his having said that, for it grew more and more like one, as his eyes pierced the dim light for the place where he thought his clothes were.

After a few moments he realised with a flash of horror that they had gone, to the very last particle of attire he had had, together with his watch, and in their place was an old dressing-gown.

"What's the meaning of this?" he thought. "Surely theft can't go on in a clergyman's house in this wholesale manner—unless"—he paused for a second to recover from the shock the sudden thought gave him—"unless I have been lured into a trap, and this is really the house of a gang of thieves! But surely there is nothing they can get from me! Why, even if it should be so, should they imprison me?"

No, there must be some awful mistake; probably lazy

How to Become a Millionaire.

There are as many recipes for the performance of this trick as there are for the making of cakes. "Practise all the virtues," says one. "Deny yourself," advises another; "fight against every instinct of your nature which costs either money or time; work and save; and when you are very old and about to die you shall have the gratification of being envied for your riches." Another man who has amassed more than a million by trade and is still under fifty, says: "Never manfuacture anything; buy cheaply, sell dearly, and give no credit." A Chicago millionaire attributes his success to his habit of regarding every man as a thief until he has proof of his honesty—a cynical perversion of the older and more charitable plan of regarding every man as honest until he proves himself the reverse. Clearly, the wise ones who would teach us how to become millionaires are very numerous, and no two of them tender the same advice.

All these teachers may be right, though it is more probable that all of them are wrong. But one thing is sure—no man ever yet became a millionaire as a result of following advice, however good that advice might be. Another thing equally certain is that no dyspeptic has ever been known to acquire a fortune; his headache, weariness, and depression make it impossible. It would seem, therefore, that a good first step towards success is investment in a bottle of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and so insure freedom from indigestion.

"For sixteen years I suffered from indigestion, at times so severely that I could not work." Thus writes Mr. Joseph Mullens, of the Post Office, Tatsfield, Surrey, on October 16th, 1903. Mr. Mullens continues: "Whatever I ate was sure to cause me great pain. I was much troubled with violent headaches and dizziness. As if this were not enough for me to endure, I suffered from frequent attacks of biliousness, which badly affected my sight. Some medicine prescribed for me by a doctor having failed to do me any good, I was induced to try Mother Seigel's Syrup, and very soon found relief. The pain after eating, the headache, and dizziness all left me. Soon I could enjoy my food as I had not done for years, and a very few bottles were sufficient to make me as well as ever I was in my life. I would not on any account be without some of the Syrup at hand in case of need."

Many people are prevented from acquiring wealth only by ill health, while some who acquire it lose their health in its pursuit, and so derive no benefit from their success. The remedy is to act as Mr. Mullens did.

Domestic Friction.

"The longer I live," writes "A Countess" in the *Outlook*, "the more convinced I am that breakfast is the cause of more domestic friction than can be accounted for by mere incompatibility of temper. It is not in human nature," she adds, "to be amiable in the early morning." Why it is so, is easy to understand when we remember that nine people out of every ten suffer from indigestion in one form or other. To awake in the morning fagged and worn out, dull of head and weary of limb, and with a taste in the mouth that makes breakfast a mockery, is certainly not conducive to good temper and geniality. The fault is not with the breakfast, but with the stomach that should call for and digest it. Thousands of dyspeptics have proved the power of Mother Seigel's Syrup to cleanse and tone the stomach, liver and kidneys, sharpen the appetite, assist digestion, even the temper and invigorate the system. Says one of them, Mrs. Holloway, of 3, Church Street, Henley-on-Thames: "I used to suffer such dreadful agony from indigestion. For years my life was a misery. After doctors' treatment had failed, my son's wife made me try Seigel's Syrup and gradually the pain subsided. All the other ailments followed, and soon I was as well as ever.[12]

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(continued.)

servants who had taken his clothes out to brush—but again, why had he stayed here at all?

He remembered that, contrary to his usual custom, he had been prevailed upon to drink some wine! He began to see now that the wine had been drugged, but why?

Feverish to find out the worst, he rang his bedroom bell, then went to the door to open it, but it was locked.

"Very well," he said with firm lips. "There is to be trouble, is there? Then I shall not go under without a fight!"

He went to the bell and pulled it again several times; then slipped into the dressing gown and waited.

His nerves were strung to an unusual pitch of excitement, and as the moments went by and no answer came to his repeated ringing of the bell, he went to the door and kicked it with all his strength; he had been left his boots, and he used them to good purpose, for soon after the key turned in the lock, and two men entered. They were the "cleric" of the night before, and the man who had called for him at 3 Lillie Road.

Philip looked at them haughtily. "I wish to know the meaning of this extraordinary proceeding," he said haughtily. "I came here as a guest last night, thinking I was in the company of gentlemen—and now on coming to my senses—after the *drugged* wine you gave me—I am absolutely without any clothing, and the windows are locked and the shutters made fast, also the door. Will you kindly tell me the meaning of this poor jest?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Nullius," said the "vicar" gently. "No harm is intended you, and you are only detained here to sign a paper promising to keep a certain bargain. I am sorry you are frightened, but it is my strict duty to carry out my orders concerning you."

"Orders from whom, and why this secrecy?" demanded Philip.

"I am to ask you to sign a paper saying that you will never return to Crawley, or attempt to see the daughter of Sir Cyprian Rust; you must also resign your curacy at Crawley. Miss Rust is engaged now to her cousin, Edward Day, and if you sign that paper I am to see that your expenses are paid wherever you wish to go, provided it is not in England."

"And if I refuse to sign such rubbish, and refuse utterly to relinquish my right to Marcella Rust's hand, what then?" said Philip hotly.

He had not anticipated such a proceeding on the part of Sir Cyprian; he had, in fact, trusted him implicitly. But now, even Marcella, his loved one, they wished to make out false! He laughed the idea to scorn. His beautiful love to be anything but true and noble! Still, in his heart there rankled a soreness that Marcella had not attempted to write to him, and find out his address.

He looked steadily at the man who had posed so successfully as a clergyman the night before, and said:

"What if I refuse to put my name to such a paper, and instead demand my liberty? How will you prevent my getting it?"

The man laughed softly. "Why, Mr. Nullius, you will be kept here till you arrive at a more reasonable frame of mind. We don't mind how long we keep you here. But very soon you will find this basement getting very damp, and it will not be so comfortable as a cosy vicarage."

"Oh, but this is nonsense!" Philip said. "I shall be missed, inquiries will be made, and what then? It is impossible to hide people in this way!"

"Nothing is impossible to a determined man, Mr. Nullius," laughed the other. "I regret that you should be placed in such bad quarters, but it is the best I can do for you—will you sign that paper or not?"

"Never!" returned Philip hotly. "I will never sign away my liberty or my happiness for anyone; and if you think you can bully me you will find you have got hold of the wrong man. I can fight—and I will, too; you will not conquer me."

"*We* may not conquer you, Mr. Nullius," said the "vicar" sarcastically, "but *this* room might; the damp is fearful, it soon—kills—and bodies would rot in no time down here."

Philip made a sudden leap to the door. His brain was on fire, and he longed to get out, to fight his way so that he could come face to face with the smooth-tongued villain who was Marcella's father. As he grasped and flung the second man out of his path, the other cried roughly:

"Look out, Boulter! He's a sharp one, worse luck. I'll soon settle him in a way he won't like."

Boulter made a plunge towards the daring curate, but as he raised his hand to clutch Philip back before he escaped, the latter turned and dealt him a stinging blow between the eyes. It was utterly unexpected, and Boulter, with a muttered oath, fell back into the arms of the man who had watched, with keen eyes, the encounter between the curate and his hireling.

Philip, once outside, pulled the door to quickly and locked it, then stood in some hesitation as to his next move. He did not know in the least where he was, and to attempt to get out of the place in that wretched dressing-gown would be an act of madness. Yet, on the other hand, if he stayed where he was, he would be subjected to probably far more stringent treatment by his captors.

As he stood straining his ears to catch a sound from the room within, and to be prepared for an attack from the passage from where he knew the other men of the strange company would come, a light step broke the stillness, and as it drew nearer Philip guessed that it could not be that of a man. Yet how should a woman be living in such a place as "Water Grange" unless she were a party to what went on within its walls?

Yes, it was a woman, and as she came nearer Philip saw that she was young, and her face was pretty in a fair, baby-style, but her blue eyes looked moody, and a petulant expression lurked at the corners of her mouth.

When she saw Philip—a somewhat startling figure wrapped in a dingy dressing-gown and crouching against the wall, she uttered a stifled cry.

"Goodness! Who are you? What are you doing there?" she demanded, her voice trembling in spite of her effort to keep it calm.

"Please don't betray me," Philip whispered. "If those men in that room hear you they may stoop to any outrage. I came here as a guest last night—and now——" he finished bitterly—"I am a victim to a piece of black villainy."

While he had been speaking, the girl's face had slowly changed from fear to an expression of intelligence, and understanding.

"I see," she said slowly. "Now I know why they wanted to get me off to bed last night! They are up to some of their pretty tricks again."

Philip's face cleared. "Then you are not one of them?" he said in a tone of relief. "Thank Heaven!"

"Me—one of *them!*" ejaculated his fair companion. "Not much! I only came here myself yesterday morning. The beauty who runs this charming place is my honoured and respected father!"

The irony in her voice was not lost on Philip. He looked at her incredulously. "Your father! But surely you are not—not——" His voice trailed off into a murmur as he read the increased expression of hate in her large blue eyes.

"No, I'm *not!*" she said shortly. "I am glad to say that I don't often honour my parent with my presence, but when I do it is because I am on my last legs for a penny, and this is better than the workhouse! But tell me," she went on quickly, "what happened in there," with a nod at the door, "and who are the men, or the man?"

Philip listened for a moment; no noise came from the inside, but down the passage along which the girl had come, he heard a low, peculiar whistle.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Man who Passed.

THE girl heard it, too, for her face blanched, and she cast a hasty look behind her.

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"Ah! they are on the look out!" she murmured. "There is a way of communication with the front of the house from any room. Look here,——" Turning to him suddenly, with a flush on her cheeks. "I'll stand by you. I don't know who you are or what they are doing with you, but I am pretty sure that they are in the wrong, and you in the right. Follow me as quietly as you can; I'll hide you."

Without daring to speak his gratitude to his imperious young benefactress, Philip followed closely on her heels. She led him down a few steps, then pushed a door that opened on to a flight of stairs, that when mounted led into a small room, plainly but comfortably furnished.

"Stay here," she said in a low voice, eyeing critically his strong, handsome face, which not even his incongruous garb could conceal. "This is my own particular room; no one ever dares to come into it, not even the manservant. I tidy it myself, and always keep the key in my pocket, so you need not fear an interruption."

Philip put out his hand. With the exception of Marcella, his own dear love, he had never felt such a wave of admiration for anyone, save this strangely free and easy, yet haughty girl, with the bitter mouth and wistful eyes.

"I can't thank you," he said gratefully, "but, believe me, I feel your kindness awfully, Miss—Miss——"

A sudden flush stained her creamy skin. "My name's Lottie!" she said carelessly. "You may call me that if you like. And you don't owe me any thanks," she went on hurriedly. "It's lucky I happened to be out of an engagement—my tour broke up rather suddenly.

"I'm on the stage," she explained in answer to his look of bewilderment, "and had I kept on tour, I would not have been obliged to come to this hovel, but my money was all used up, and so I came to my natal place. I'm glad I did now!" She finished with a vivid smile. "I have been of some use at last. Tell me who the men were in the room you got out of, and what happened. It will help me to find out where your clothes are likely to be."

Very quietly and briefly Philip explained what had taken place, and how he managed to knock down the man called "Boulter;" they had turned the key in the lock.

She listened with an intent look on her face, her mouth dimpling suddenly as she learnt of Boulter being knocked down.

"Well, the 'Vicar,' you will be interested to hear, is my adoring, and adored father," she said calmly. "What he's doing out of prison I don't know! He ought to have been there years ago—and Boulter is his right hand—or in this case his *left*.

"They are birds of a feather, and I'm glad that for once he's got what he deserved. He's a dangerous man, and I wouldn't give much for your life if he could find you after that. Now I'm off. Don't make the slightest attempt to stir out of the place or show yourself at the window. I won't forget you!"

With a brief nod she went out of the room, and closing the door, locked it; then slipped the key in her pocket, and ran down the front staircase—not that by which she had brought her *protégé* up from the underground passage.

In the front room she came face to face with the "Vicar" and the man Boulter. They both looked furious, and were speaking in an undertone to another man:

"He's in the place somewhere—a man can't escape in the open clad in a dressing-gown, and when I get hold of him, Mr. Philip Nullius shall pay for this little joke! I was inclined to be lenient to him at first, but now—I wouldn't give much for Miss Marcella seeing her lover again."

Lottie paused in the doorway. "Marcella"—it was a name not easily forgotten; one that she had taught herself to hate, because of what it had meant for her.

A woman of that name had encouraged her lover, afterwards her husband, and finally won him by her beauty from the woman who had married him! It was a strange coincidence that the name of the woman the handsome stranger loved, should also be "Marcella."

"Has anything happened to upset you, 'Vicar'?" she said aloud, coming forward leisurely to the table. "You look as though you had not had a pleasant morning."

The man turned on her with a snarl. "Mind your own business, Miss," he retorted, then stopped abruptly. The man Boulter had touched him with his elbow.

"Oh, Lottie," he said in a changed voice. "I have been wondering whether you have seen anything of a gentleman who is staying with me now. He is a bit of an invalid, and I have promised to look after him until he is stronger. He slipped out of his room this morning, we find, and is nowhere to be found. Have you been anywhere near the spare room?"

Lottie shook her head. She was watching him keenly, for all her apparent nonchalance. "The spare room—that's rather vague, isn't it? There are so many spare rooms here, 'Vicar'—Water Grange is full of them."

The man flushed angrily, and bit his lip. He dared not say it was the room in which no guest would stay willingly for half an hour, and Lottie knew the cause of his discomfiture, and was secretly amused at it.

"It doesn't matter which room," he said sharply. "It's enough to know that he has escaped—I mean gone away—and I am quite certain the man is in one of the rooms in the Grange. Already Wallis and Mouser are searching for him."

Lottie yawned. "Oh, well, you don't want the whole household to turn out and look for an old fogey in a dressing-gown, do you, 'Vicar'? Why don't you get the police to help you?" she added maliciously.

"You little cat! Get out of the room, or I'll throw you out!" shouted her irate parent.

Once in the hall with the door shut, Lottie's face relaxed into a smile of irony. "So the whole house is searching, eh, 'Vicar'! I don't fancy they will touch my room. It will be quite a pleasure to do an honourable, decent action towards a poor wretch who has fallen into your unholy hands!" Her face flushed, then paled with a sudden thought.

"Yes—I'll get him safe away, then go myself. He seems a good sort, and he's handsome, too. I wish Fate had intended me to meet such a man earlier, instead of that craven cur, Edward."

She bit her lips as the face of the man she had once loved so dearly rose before her. Now the scales had fallen from her eyes she knew that the object of her love was only after all a poor, pitiful wretch with feet of very indifferent clay.

But such is the strange perversity of a woman's heart, that despising, hating, and loathing, as she did, Lottie knew that did Edward Day come to her, and, putting his arms round her, beg her to take him back, she would forget the past ignominious neglect and deceit she had suffered at his hands, and welcome him with an open heart!

As she went softly up the stairs she met the old manservant, Wallis, with a bundle of clothes in his arms.

"What's that, Wallis?" she said good-humouredly. "Getting your trousseau ready?"

The man grinned. He was a rough, surly specimen of humanity, but he always unbent a little under Lottie's careless banter.

"No, missie; it's the master's two suits of clothes I'm taking to his room; they needed brushing badly."

Lottie noted the old man's heavy breathing, and said:

"I'm going upstairs, Wallis. Those things look too much for you. I'll take them in less than half the time."

Before he could stop her she had seized the bundle from his arms, and ran lightly upstairs with it.

On the landing she paused, and a slow smile parted her lips.

"A very good idea," she said softly. "I have not learnt the art of making-up for nothing. You have suggested a very clever trick to me, Wallis. I thank you most heartily! For once in a way the 'Vicar's' vestments will be used in the furthering of justice."

Some time between the hour of twilight and night a tall distinguished looking old man, with white hair and clad in clerical dress, strolled along the road that led into Leyton village. He was deep in thought, and did not note a man, large of frame and haggard of face, who passed him with unseeing eyes, and halting steps.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

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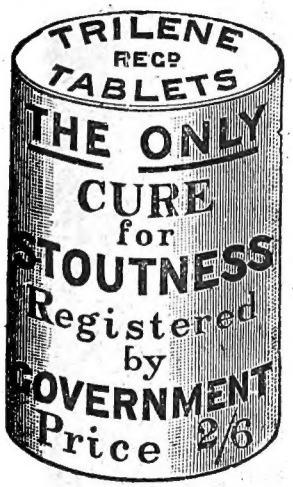

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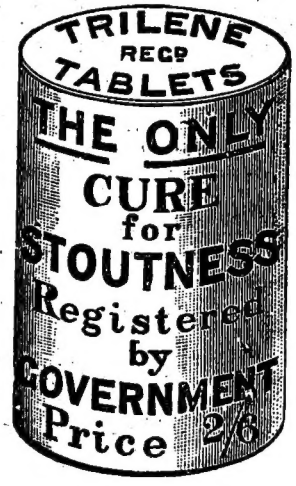

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Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE COMPANY, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Renewing an Acquaintance.

I AM glad, "HARRY," that my advice brought about the happiness of your friend. As to your own case, if the young lady agreed to go out with you when you asked her before, why should she not be agreeable to do so again, if you liked each other? The fact that you have not seen her for some time does not prevent your writing. She would, in fact, be rather pleased to hear that you have not forgotten her. It would be nicer if you knew her parents. Perhaps she will ask you to go and have tea, or something of the kind, so that you will have the chance. Write to her, and leave it to her to decide whether she wishes to see you again, and if so, how the matter can be managed.

A Leap Year Chance.

THE young man who won't propose comes along once more this week. "SNOWDROP" has been going out with him for three years, but he has said never a word about engagement, though they are both very fond of each other, and their parents are quite willing. What is "SNOWDROP" to do?

* * * * *

Well, "SNOWDROP," this is the first Leap Year for eight years. Though I do not believe in ladies taking advantage of that superstition, which says they may propose to the men, it might be a very good opportunity in your own case, as you are both such old friends. In any case, you might hint to him that it *is* Leap Year, and that you feel rather inclined to avail yourself of it. Then who knows but that he may not save you the trouble?

Faint Heart Again.

"ROBERT" says he is in an awkward position. At the place where he works there are several girls employed, and he is much in love with one of them. He is afraid to tell her this in case his love is not returned, which, he says, would make things uncomfortable for him, as they work very near to each other. On the other hand, if he does not do so, somebody else may step in. The girl is at present free from sweethearts.

* * * * *

Be bold, "Robert," but discreet. Seek an opportunity for a quiet conversation with the girl, either by asking her out for an evening or in some other way. Then see how the wind blows. You should soon be able to judge whether or not the girl is interested in you. If she is, then ask her permission to see her more often. I quite understand that you do not like to blurt out that you are in love with her without ever having seen much of her. That certainly would make a man look foolish if the girl happened to be attached in another direction. But you had better be quick about it, or certainly somebody else will come along. Remember the proverb about "faint heart."

Two to Make a Quarrel.

"IRISH LASS" tells me that she and her young man have quarrelled over the photo of another man. I am sorry to hear it, for I must say that quarrelling over so trivial a matter speaks badly for them both. Remember a breach is very easy to make, and very difficult to heal. I should either see him or write to him, and tell him you are lonely and miserable, and, if he really cares for you, he will be glad enough to be friends again.

A Very Contemptible Man.

YOU tell me, "ANXIOUS ONE," that you were introduced to a young man at a bazaar, and went out with him several times, and then you found out that he was going out with other young women as well. You said you would have nothing more to do with him if he was going to treat you like that. He now seeks mischief with everyone you go out with. You ask if I consider it is a right spirit for any young man to have. No; I think he must be a very mean, despicable young man. You were quite right to give him up. Your letters are by no means a trouble; write as often as you like. I am only too pleased to be able to help you.

The Girl and Parents Problem.

"DAVID" is worried over the question of introducing his loved one to his parents. While they are willing that he should marry, the girl's parents are not, so that the two are not yet engaged. In this case, would it be advisable for "DAVID" to introduce her to his own family?

* * * * *

I think it would be a most admirable thing for "DAVID" to do. The fact that the girl knew his people, and that they approved of her, might be the very thing needed to make her parents consent to an engagement. I know a girl who was engaged to a young fellow, and the sole objection her father had was that he knew nothing of the young man, or his family connections. The young man's answer was to invite the girl and her mother to his parents' home, which turned out to be a very nice one indeed. This at once satisfied the stern father, who, seeing that the young man was well connected, gave his consent. This example might apply in "DAVID'S" case.

Marriage by License.

"H. F. G." writes: "Can you tell me what details are necessary in getting married at a registrar's office? She is eighteen, I am twenty."

* * * * *

You may be married by certificate or license. If by certificate, you must give formal notice to the superintendent registrar of the district, both parties having lived there for seven days. You must make a solemn statement that there is no legal obstacle to the marriage, and carry out other instructions which the registrar would give you. The certificate would then be issued within twenty-one days. After the twenty-one days, the wedding may take place at a registry office. You simply make a mutual declaration, and in most cases the bridegroom places a ring on his spouse's finger. If a license is required, it must be obtained at either the Faculty Office, 23 Knightrider Street, E.C., or at the Vicar General's Office, 3 Creed Lane, Ludgate Hill. A license costs thirty shillings, and stamp duty of twelve and six. You must also make a declaration on oath as to there being no legal obstacle, and also must have lived fifteen days in the parish where the marriage will be celebrated. This latter you may dispense with by obtaining a special license, which, however, costs about £30.

Cynthia

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